



Lethal Politics: Soviet Genocide and Mass Murder Since 1917

By R. J. Rummel



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While there are estimates of the number of people killed by Soviet authorities during particular episodes or campaigns, until now, no one has tried to calculate the complete human toll of Soviet genocides and mass murders since the revolution of 1917. Here, R. J. Rummel lists and analyzes hundreds of published estimates, presenting them in the historical context in which they occurred. His shocking conclusion is that, conservatively calculated, 61,911,000 people were systematically killed by the Communist regime from 1917 to 1987.

Rummel divides the published estimates on which he bases his conclusions into eight historical periods, such as the Civil War, collectivization, and World War II. The estimates are further divided into agents of death, such as terrorism, deportations, and famine. Using statistical principles developed from more than 25 years of quantitative research on nations, he analyzes the estimates. In the collectivization period, for example, about 11,440,000 people were murdered. During World War II, while the Soviet Union had lost almost 20,000,000 in the war, the Party was killing even more of its citizens and foreigners—probably an additional 13,053,000. For each period, he defines, counts, and totals the sources of death. He shows that Soviet forced labor camps were the major engine of death, probably killing 39,464,000 prisoners overall.

To give meaning and depth to these figures, Rummel compares them to the death toll from major wars, world disasters, global genocide, deaths from cancer and other diseases, and the like. In these and other ways, Rummel goes well beyond the bare bones of statistical analysis and tries to provide understanding of this incredible toll of human lives. Why were these people killed? What was the political and social context? How can we understand it? These and other questions are addressed in a compelling historical narrative.

This definitive book will be of interest to Soviet experts, those interested in the study of genocide and violence, peace researchers, and students of comparative politics and society. Written without jargon, its statistics are confined to appendixes, and the general reader can profitably read the book without losing the essence of the findings, which are selectively repeated in the narrative.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Rummel has taken on the assignment of making an accounting, once and for all, of the people killed by the Soviets since 1917... Rummel has provided a plethora of statistics, graphs, and sources for his estimates. College and research libraries.”

—A. Ezergailis, *Choice*

About the Author

R. J. Rummel was professor emeritus of political science at the University of Hawaii. He is the author of over one hundred scholarly articles and two dozen books, including *Power Kills*, *China's Bloody Century*, and *The Miracle That Is Freedom*. In addition, he has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and been the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Conflict Processes Section of the American Political Science Association and the International Association of Genocide Scholars' Award for Distinguished Lifetime Contribution to the Field of Genocide and Democide Studies and Prevention.

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