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The sensation of liberty

by [Michael Weiss](#)

On the oft-forgotten historian Tibor Szamuely.

Letters published in the *New York Review of Books* usually take the form of invective (“In his woefully inadequate essay on Incan virgin sacrifice...”), not tribute. So it was a rare occurrence indeed to behold Robert Conquest’s amicable missive to this liberal journal of opinion in response to a footnote in John Banville’s March review of *House of Meetings*, Martin Amis’s new novel set in the gulag:

I am particularly glad to read in [Amis’s] acknowledgments the tribute to Tibor Szamuely, who understood Stalinism better than I did. I remember saying to him that I could see why Stalin had Marshal Tukhachevski shot, but why did he do the same to his old friend Marshal Yegorev? Tibor’s answer was “Why not?”

Someone who understood Stalinism better than Robert Conquest is surely worthy of our attention, and in the case of Tibor Szamuely ...

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