

The New Criterion

Features

February 2008

Inhuman power of the lie: “The Great Terror” at 40

by [Michael Weiss](#)

On the anniversary of the definitive work on Stalin's purges.

I met Robert Conquest two summers ago in Palo Alto, which he has made his home, as a fellow of Stanford University's Hoover Institution, for the past two decades. Christopher Hitchens had sent Conquest, the *primus inter pares* of Sovietology, a review I had written of a recent Stalin biography that evidently impressed him, and a lunch was arranged at the Hitchens's household. For a few hours I got to chat with the premier truth-teller of the most sustained totalitarianism of the twentieth century.

As it happened, Conquest had just completed another series of light verse—“bawdy,” as he prefers to call it—at which I was fortunate enough to get an advance peek. Those familiar with the full oeuvre of this extraordinary man, responsible for Margaret Thatcher's “Iron Lady” speech and dubbed, at the last plenum of the Central Committee, “anti-Sovietchik number one,” w ...

Michael Weiss is the executive director of Just Journalism, a London-based think tank that monitors the British media's coverage of Israel and the Middle East.

[more from this author](#)

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 26 February 2008, on page 17

Copyright © 2012 The New Criterion | www.newcriterion.com

<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Inhuman-power-of-the-lie---ldquo-The-Great-Terror-rdquo--at-40-3755>