

The Anatomy of Perdition

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The Notebooks of Sologdin, by Dimitri

Panin, translated from the Russian by Thomas Moore, *New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich*, 1976. 320 pp. \$12.95.

The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, Vol-

ume 2 (Parts III & IV) by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, translated from the Russian by Thomas P. Whitney, *New York: Harper & Row, Publishers*, 1975. 712 pp. \$15.00 (paper \$2.50).

I

THE AUTHORS of these two books about life, terror, and death in the Soviet slave camps were for several years prison companions and firm friends. They met for the first time in the *sharashka*, or privileged prison for scientists and technologists useful to the régime, afterwards made famous as the setting for Solzhenitsyn's novel, *The First Circle*. Nearly all the characters in that novel were drawn from the life and many of them reappear in this powerful memoir by Sologdin-Panin, who it seems is now living in Paris, a devout convert to the Roman Catholic Church. In the darkest hour of his captivity in the camp hospital at Vyatlag, wasted almost to a skeleton by weeks of pellagrous dysentery, he turned to religious meditation and was rescued from death by what he firmly believes to have been a miraculous intervention of Providence.

As for Solzhenitsyn, despite his protestation that to convey all the "savage meaning" of the Stalinist terror "is beyond the capabilities of one lonely pen," he has with

his rare literary genius and fierce fervor for truth and justice put before the world in *The Gulag Archipelago* a great and terrifying epic, a panorama of horrors and heroisms without counterpart in history. It is impossible to read him without shudders or without fears that what has happened to the Russian and the German societies may be but the prelude to what will happen in our own. Solzhenitsyn is one of those who see in the apocalyptic terrors of our time the culminative effects of the philosophic forces and social tendencies set loose by the Enlightenment. Both Solzhenitsyn and Panin make much of the reversal of moral and legal values involved in the transition from nineteenth century humanitarian liberalism to twentieth century totalitarian dogmatism, and both ascribe it to the declining influences of religion. We need not look very far from home to find incipient analogies to the inverted notions of guilt and innocence reflected in the transfer of judicial solicitude from the victims of violent crime to the perpetrators of it. Solzhenitsyn cites the severe restrictions placed on the traditional right of self-defense in the Soviet Criminal Code of 1926. Under one of its articles a citizen who may be attacked on the street by a mugger is forbidden to unsheath his knife until after the criminal has unsheathed his own: "you could stab him only after he had stabbed you." Solzhenitsyn mentions the case of one Aleksandr Zakharov,¹ a Red Army man, who was attacked by a thug, for apparently no particular reason, and badly beaten. Zakharov managed to extract a small folding penknife from his pocket and to open a blade, and with this killed his assailant. He was found guilty of willful murder and sentenced to ten years imprisonment.

"Why, what was I supposed to do?" the astonished Zakharov asked the court. "You should have fled," snapped the prosecutor.

The twenties, the thirties, the fifties! Who does not remember that eternal threat hovering over the citizen: Don't go where it's dark! Don't come home late! Don't wear your watch! Don't carry money with you! Don't leave the apartment empty! Locks! Shutters! Dogs! . . .

In the file of the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* for September, 1955, Solzhenitsyn found an account of a man who was beaten to death in a Moscow street alongside a house occupied by two families who watched the performance from their windows but made no effort to interrupt it. Another witness, however, this one a retired officer and an Old Bolshevik, became indignant and demanded that the two families be charged with abetting a murder. The editor of the *Gazeta*, to whom the complaint seems to have been brought, agreed that the incident was indeed deplorable but unhappily not illegal. Some who read this may recall the case, a decade ago or thereabouts, of a Miss Kitty Genovese whose screams drew no response when she was similarly attacked and murdered in full view of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of freeborn, freedom-loving American apartment house dwellers, not one of whom bothered even to inform the police.

II

IN THE MARXIST scheme of things, as Solzhenitsyn explains, common criminals—such as thieves, muggers, murderers, rapists and so on—are deemed authentic members of the *Lumpenproletariat* with a wholly commendable disdain for the institution of private property. Thus in the eyes of the Party ideologues they constitute a "friendly element" and are seen as potential allies or auxiliaries in the class war, and are accord-

ingly treated with special consideration. In the prison camps to which it is occasionally necessary to consign them—as when for example they fail to remember the important distinction between *state* and *private* property—they constitute a privileged caste—something close to an élite. It is an axiom sanctified by the Marxist revelation that criminals are what they are, not because of Original Sin or any other form of innate wickedness, but solely because of an unfavorable environment created by capitalist greed and oppression. So it was that the Bolsheviks after their triumph in 1917 recognized the Russian criminals as

a revolutionary force that had to be guided into the mainstream of the proletariat . . . and this would constitute no difficulty. An unprecedented multitude of newcomers grew up to join them, consisting of orphans of the civil war and famine—homeless waifs, or *besprizorniki*, and hoodlums. They warmed themselves at asphalt cauldrons during the New Economic Policy, and for their first lessons they learned to cut ladies' purses off their arms and to lift suitcases through train windows. . . .

Observing this, the Party theoreticians began to say to themselves and to one another:

. . . Let us reeducate these healthy lumpenproletarians and introduce them into the system of conscious life! And the first communes came into existence for this purpose, and the first children's colonies, and the motion picture, *The Road to Life*. . . .

Now, when more than forty years have gone by, one can look around and have doubts. Who educated whom? Did the Chekists reeducate the thieves or the thieves the Chekists? The *urka*—the habitual thief—who adopted the Chekist faith became a *bitch*, and his fellow-thieves would cut his throat. The Chekist who acquired the psychology of the thief became the energetic interrogator

. . . or else a resolute camp chief—such men were appreciated. They got the promotions. . . .

A *bitch* in the Gulag jargon meant a criminal who collaborated with the camp authorities and became a spy and informer. Such persons—for they included both men and women—acquired powers of life and death over other inmates and were greatly feared and bitterly hated, not only by the political prisoners but even more so by the other criminals who held to a curious code of honor, which though it might sanction the stealing of food rations and clothing from the helpless and starving, drew a line at the betrayal of one's own kind. They would kill the *bitches* without compunction whenever opportunity offered, as frequently it did.

Solzhenitsyn is as scornful of the criminals who held fast to their code as of those who turned informer against their own comrades in crime. "No matter how much I saw of one and the other, I never could see that one rabble was nobler than the other." Those were presumably "honorable thieves" who knocked out the gold teeth of Estonian prisoners and drowned Lithuanian prisoners in the toilets at Kraslag for refusing to turn over a food parcel; who would plunder prisoners condemned to death; who would murder a cellmate for the sake of getting a new interrogation and trial and so of spending the winter in a warmer place.

The one effect of Marxist education on the lumpenproletarians seems to have been to strengthen their hostility to private property, and in this respect, says Solzhenitsyn, their hatred of the bourgeoisie was real enough, but it extended equally to Communist bureaucrats who owned dachas and motor cars. All the rest of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism they dismiss as twaddle. Their attitude to life is summed up thus:

Everything they come across on life's path they take as their own (if it is not too dangerous). Even when they have a surfeit of everything, they reach out

to grab what belongs to others because any unstolen article makes a thief sick at heart. They wear the clothes they have stolen while they have novelty, until they tire of them, and soon afterward lose them at cards. Card games that last several nights on end give them their most powerful sensations, and in this respect they have far outdone the Russian nobility of past eras. They can even gamble *an eye* for stakes (and tear out the loser's eye on the spot). They can also play for . . . the right to use the loser for perverted [sexual] enjoyment. . . .

And Panin, it seems, knows of incidents where the loser at cards was obliged to carry out a murder prescribed by the winner.

III

UNLIKE Solzhenitsyn, however, Panin has some sympathy for the criminals, at least for those who obeyed their "code of honor." He agrees that in some historical situations criminality may be the effect of a hostile environment and that this was true for many of the first post-revolutionary generation whose only choice, especially after the great state-provoked famines, was between thievery and starvation. Besides the new government in both pattern and conduct was criminal, for Panin has pointed out how Lenin had recruited his Bolshevik Party on the very principles employed by a bandit chieftain in selecting and disciplining the members of his band; *viz.*:

1. blind submission to the will and orders of the boss;
2. periodic "purges" to eliminate possible violators of underworld law, "trials for offenders and vindictive sentences, anti-human ethics";
3. excommunication and destruction of renegades ("*bitches*");
4. a sharp distinction between members of the gang bound together by the code and the common herd of non-criminals.

Panin had not been long in the camps be-

fore deciding that each of them is a microscopic mirror of Soviet life in general.

The camp's criminal element corresponds to the ruling Communist Party element, just as the Communist Party had modeled itself after an underworld gang. The most vicious segment among the criminals performs duties comparable to those of the Chekists, while the rest of them act as spies and informers. Their chiefs fulfill the functions of the judges. The *frayers*, the *muzhiks*, and the *Sidor Polikarpoviches* correspond to the ordinary masses outside the party. These people, like their kind outside, are isolated, timorous, cowardly, mean, easily swayed by rumors, without confidence in their own powers. . . .

Panin, though a Christian who believes the whole message of Christianity to be contained in the Lord's Prayer, nevertheless insists that the killing of informers is a justified measure of defense against the evil power of the political police. "All my life," he writes,

I had been opposed to terrorism in any form and had always supported the struggle against it. But in conditions of unabated Chekist terrorism against prisoners in the camps, informers became instruments of terror, and were, in effect, terrorists themselves. Under those circumstances the elimination of a notorious informant who had caused the death of several prisoners and undermined the health of many others was an act of self-defense and self-preservation. . . . One had to cut off the tentacles of an octopus. . . .

In the "hard labor" camp at Ekibastuz where Panin and Solzhenitsyn spent some of the latter months of their captivity informers were being done away with by the other prisoners at the rate of something like five or six a month, and without them the Chekists became virtually impotent. It was at Ekibastuz that a big riot and strike occurred in which Panin was a leader.

IV

SOLZHENITSYN'S RESEARCH has demolished a myth still fondly cherished by some Western liberals, and after the Twentieth Party Congress promoted by some Soviet historians:² that Stalin alone was responsible for the creation of the slave camps and that they represented a complete departure by the tyrant from the humanitarian concepts of Marxism and Leninism. They were, on the contrary, an inescapable corollary of the class war, which Lenin from the first was prepared to wage with all rigor and ruthlessness. Marxist and Leninist, too, was the principle of forced labor; prisoners of the workers' regime were not to waste time reading books or writing poems or arguing with one another about abstruse points of political theory, as the revolutionary forefathers had often been allowed to do in the latter days of the tsarist dispensation. Class enemies under Communism would atone for their sins against the dialectic of history by wholesome and productive labor. Or if any should prove so unregenerate as to refuse to labor at building Communism, his proletarian jailers were simply to forget to feed him. *Si quis non vult operari, nec manducet*:³ it is perhaps the one point at which the Marxian and the Pauline scriptures accord.

If there was a slight delay about getting this salutary program into practice, it was because of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. Having helped the Bolsheviks in October 1917 they were allowed for a brief time afterward to share the power with them and to control among other things the ministry of justice. These Left Essars, as the sarcastic Solzhenitsyn puts it, were tainted by "rotten petty-bourgeois concepts of freedom" and showed no disposition to adopt and enforce "the progressive principle of forced labor." But in July, 1918, the Left Essars were purged from the government, suppressed elsewhere, and haughtily relegated by Comrade Trotsky to the "dustbin of history." The prisons which had been pretty well emptied under the provi-

sional government began to fill up rapidly with various sorts of class enemies and new prisons were created by seizing monasteries and convents and evicting the monks and other religious. The first of the great arctic prison camps was created in the Solovetsky Islands of the White Sea where a famous monastery had existed since mediaeval times, to which a cathedral and a score of other churches had subsequently been added, and where a kremlin, or fortress, had been built by the tsars to discourage invasions from Scandinavia.

At Solovetsky there seem to have been at first few criminal prisoners and only a handful of Chekists. The administration seems to have been mostly in the hands of the prisoners themselves and discipline, often cruel and erratic, left oddly enough to former White officers from the armies of Kolchak, Denikin, and Wrangel. There were acute shortages of everything, but particularly of clothing, and in the arctic winter many prisoners had nothing to wear but burlap sacks into which apertures had been cut for the head, arms and legs. Prisoners condemned to be shot were required to strip themselves naked before being taken to the place of execution. Solzhenitsyn tells of a debonair aristocrat named Georgi Mikhailovich Osorgin, who was sentenced to die on the very day he was expecting a visit from his beautiful young wife.

Osorgin begged his jailors not to spoil his wife's visit for her. He promised that he would not let her stay more than three days and that they could shoot him as soon as she left. And here is the kind of self-control this meant, the sort of thing we have forgotten because of the anathema we have heaped upon the aristocracy, we who whine at every petty misfortune and every petty pain. For three days he never left his wife's side, and he had to keep her from guessing the situation! He must not hint at it even in one single phrase! He must not allow his spirits to quaver. He must not allow his eyes to darken. Just once (his wife is alive and she remembers it now),

when they were walking along the Holy Lake, she turned and saw that her husband had clutched his head in torment. "What's wrong?" "Nothing," he answered instantly. She could have stayed still longer, but he begged her to leave. As the steamer pulled away from the wharf, he was already undressing to be shot.

V

AMONG THE MANY other visitors to Solovetsky was the great proletarian literary light, Maxim Gorky. He seemed especially impressed by his inspection of the children's colony, where a bit of Potemkin magic, similar to that performed for Mrs. Roosevelt's benefit at Butyrik Prison,⁴ had been hurriedly attempted. Gorki observed with pleasure the neatness and comfort of the appointments and the happy faces of the children who gathered round him and his entourage of G.P.U. officers.

All of a sudden a fourteen-year-old boy said: "Listen, Gorky! Everything you see here is false. Do you want to know the truth? Shall I tell you?" Yes, nodded the writer. Yes, he wanted to know the truth. . . . And so everyone was ordered to leave, including the children and the accompanying *gaypayooshniki*—and the boy spent an hour and a half telling the whole story to the lanky old man. Gorky left the barracks, streaming tears. He was given a carriage to go to dinner at the villa of the camp chief. And the boys rushed back to the barracks. "Did you tell him about the *mosquito treatment*?" "Yes." "Did you tell him about the *pole torture*?" "Yes." "Did you tell him about the prisoners hitched up instead of horses?" "Yes." "And how they roll them down the stairs? And about being made to spend the night in the snow?" And it turned out that the truth-loving boy had told all. . . . But we don't even know his name. . . .

On June 23 [1929] Gorky left Solovki.

Hardly his steamer pulled away from the pier than they shot the boy. . . . And that was how faith in justice was instilled in the new generation.

VI

AT ABOUT this point in Solzhenitsyn's narrative a strange and sinister genius named Naftaly Aronovich Frenkel makes his entrance. There is a persistent legend that it was Frenkel who conceived the whole scheme of the "corrective labor camps," as they are still called, but Solzhenitsyn, as we have seen, has traced them to Lenin and to the very first year of the Bolshevik dispensation, and the germinal idea of them back a century to Marx and Engels in their *Critique of the Gotha Program*. What Frenkel actually did, however, was to draw up and put into effect a reorganization of forced labor out of which arose the vast Gulag empire and enabled Stalin in a few short decades to transform Russia from a backward feudal and agricultural society into a powerful modern industrial state. Frenkel, observes Solzhenitsyn,

was one of those successful men of action whom History awaits and summons to itself. . . . Every genuine prophet arrives when he is most acutely needed. Frenkel arrived at the Archipelago just at the beginning of the metastases.

He was not a Russian and perhaps never at any time a Marxist at heart. He was a Jew born in Constantinople and became at an early age a big-scale entrepreneur and a millionaire. He owned steamships and a newspaper and in late tsarist times controlled a great lumbering industry in the Black Sea region with headquarters at Mariupol in the southeastern Ukraine. In the First World War he is said to have trafficked for a time in arms, but in 1916, sensing the approach of revolution, he returned to Turkey, but was afterward lured back to Russia by the opportunities opened to his special talents by Lenin's New Economic Policy. Solzhenitsyn says that it was at the instigation of the G. P. U. that

Frenkel opened a black market operation for the buying of gold and other valuables with paper rubles; the gold went into the Chekist treasury, but when the NEP came to an end Frenkel's ungrateful partners threw him into their Lubyanka. Whether it was there or at Solovetsky—to which he was presently transferred—that Frenkel drew up his master plan of reorganization is uncertain. What is certain is that:

One day in 1929 an airplane flew from Moscow to get Frenkel and brought him to an appointment with Stalin. The Best Friend of the Prisoners (and the Best Friend of the Chekists) talked interestedly with Frenkel for three hours. . . . It was Frenkel in person, apparently on that precise occasion, who proposed the all-embracing system of prisoners . . . which left no leeway to the camp chiefs and even less to the prisoner: everyone not engaged in providing essential services for the camp, not verified as being ill, and not undergoing correction in a punishment cell must drag his workload every day of his sentence. The world history of hard labor has never known such universality! It was Frenkel who outlined a unified system of redistribution of the meagre food supplies for the whole Archipelago—a scale for bread rations and a scale for hot-food rations which was adapted by him from the Eskimos: a fish on a pole held out in front of the running dog team. . . .

This was the Frenkel who told the Party bosses that, "We have to squeeze everything out of a prisoner in the first three months," meaning no doubt that this was about as long as the prisoner under camp conditions could be expected to carry his full workload and to draw his ration.

After the interview with Stalin Frenkel was of course set free and as a beginning placed in charge of the fearful White Sea-Baltic canal project to which so many tens of thousands of lives were to be sacrificed. Because of the absence of machinery and of such vital requirements as steel and con-

crete it was an almost impossible assignment, but by sheer will and ruthless expenditure of flesh and blood he managed somehow to push it through to completion. For this he received the Order of Lenin, though it was only the first of his many grandiose exploits of construction. The wastage of lives and manpower was the least of his problems, for there was an exhaustless reservoir of replacements which included virtually the whole population. Under one or another article of the Criminal Code almost anyone could be sent to the camps for anything, including Chekists whose leaders had fallen into disgrace. Solzhenitsyn offers some bizarre examples: a former diplomat sentenced for saying that Gorky was not a good writer; a certain Skvortsov given fifteen years for comparing the proletarian Gorky unfavorably with the bourgeois Pushkin; a tailor putting aside his needle by sticking it into a newspaper and inadvertently piercing the eye of a photograph of Kaganovich and thereby getting himself ten years for terrorism; a saleswoman who got the same sentence for the same offense because she allowed one of several pieces of soap she was holding to fall on a newspaper portrait of Stalin; a shepherd enraged by a cow that refused to obey him, called her a "collective farm whore," and so became another terrorist; a young woman arrested after leaving a church and accused of having prayed—silently of course—for the death of Stalin. The list of such juridical lunacies could no doubt be extended indefinitely, and Solzhenitsyn in fact extends it over several pages.

Ten years ago, as he was working on the final phases of this book, Solzhenitsyn decided on a brief and surreptitious visit to the first great monument to Stalin's economic transformation of Russia on which the party propagandists had expended so much exultation—where Naftaly Frenkel won the first of his accolades and where such a multitude of famished and exhausted prisoners found their graves. Solzhenitsyn was astonished to discover that the world-fa-

mous White Sea-Baltic Canal was virtually devoid of traffic and presently learned the reason. It is only sixteen feet deep and hence unnavigable by vessels of any considerable draft. It is also, he was told, frozen solid for about half of every year.

VII

THESE BOOKS, and especially Solzhenitsyn's, are much more than extended and important addenda to the long catalogue of titanic cruelties, maniacal stupidities, and ideologic bigotries compiled from the revelations of other survivors of the Gulag empire, beginning more than a generation ago with Professor Tchernavin's *I Speak for the Silent*. Of even greater and ominous import is their testimony to the almost universal corruption of a society in which treachery and slander are accounted the highest civic virtues, where out of fear, envy, secret malice, or mere ambition men, women, and even children are led to deliver neighbors, colleagues, bosom friends and even close kindred to the merciless political police and to the horror of the slave camps. Wives renounced their husbands, and *vice versa*, children renounced their parents. "And thus," says Solzhenitsyn, "they save their lives." Sometimes, too, their careers. One thinks for example of Sergei Vavilov who retained his job as head of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and the ostensible favor of Stalin, while his brother Nikolai Vavilov, the world-famous geneticist, after enduring four hundred ordeals by interrogation and refusing at any to confess his crimes against Darwin, Marx, and Trofim Lysenko died of starvation in an arctic camp.

¹Not of course to be confused with Andrei Zakharov, the Nobel Prize-winner who is proving himself as much a headache to the Soviet Establishment as Solzhenitsyn had been.

²*Cf. Let History Judge: Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972).

³"If any should not work, neither should he eat." II Thessalonians, 3:10.

⁴See *The First Circle*, Chapter 54 (London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1968).

Geography of Injustice

Case Studies on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: A World Study, edited by Willem A. Veenhoven,

assisted by Winifred Crum Ewing, Clemens Amelunxen, Kurt Glaser, Stefan Possony, Jans Prins, Nic Rhoodie, Jiro Suzuki, and L. P. Vidyarthi, *The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff for the Foundation for the Study of Plural Societies, 1975; Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press for distribution in U.S.A. Vol. I xxi + 582 pp.; Vol. II xii + 555 pp. \$30.00 per volume.*

DESPITE THE PRESENT spate of words about human rights and freedoms, the first comprehensive survey of their suppression all over the earth is presented by this book of thirty-six articles by thirty-three authors. Their eminent qualifications for the task are shown in the biographical sketch that precedes each study. While communist oppression, anti-Semitism, discrimination against blacks in South Africa and the United States, and sex discrimination are well covered, such less obvious subjects as "The Kabyls; An Oppressed Minority in North Africa," "Foreign Workers in West Germany," and "Ethnic Minorities in Japan" illustrate the varied and complete content of the cases.

The editors define the scope of their inquiry as follows:

. . . No racially or culturally plural society can escape at least a modicum of discrimination in . . . man's social and cultural rights. Discrimination relating to fundamental human rights is the result of group differentiation based mainly on sex; culture (including religion, language, life-style, and value system); race . . .; and nationality. . . . The *differentiation* leads to *discrimination* because

the groups . . . are ranked. The case studies . . . deal mainly with major socially defined stratifications or ranking systems involving four main clusters . . . (a) *sex groups*, (b) *classes*, (c) *castes*, and (d) *minorities*.

As used in the articles, "minority . . . is not statistical; it refers to inferior position in the power structure and distribution of social benefits."¹ In Fiji, for example, discrimination is directed against an imported majority, the Indians, who by the constitution are limited to twenty-two of fifty-two seats in the lower house of the parliament.

The editors accept the inevitability of inequality arising from differences in ability. Some articles, however, note the small opportunity for upward mobility in particular societies. In Mexico, job-destiny and poverty are perpetuated by family. In Australia, though the laboring class is well organized to advance its own interest, the children of workers seldom rise to managerial positions. In each case the result flows from the social structure rather than from governmental policy. "A person can change his life style or his religion; he cannot shed the colour of his skin." Hence, the popular emphasis on racial discrimination is natural. But, as the cases demonstrate,

group differentiation conceived in terms of religion, language, life style and other cultural criteria today rates far higher as a cause of extreme human misery than group conflict defined in purely racial terms (that is, in terms of difference in biological history).²

Even in democratic countries, some unjust discrimination persists. New Zealand's treatment of its Maoris is still bad; Australia's, of its aborigines, horrible. In Israel, where such fundamental democratic rights as freedom from arbitrary arrest and freedom of expression flourish, the political swing position of the religious party has enabled the orthodox rabbinate to obtain exclusive jurisdiction over marriage and divorce, excluding not only Christians, but reform and conservative rabbis as well.