

# The Lonely Voice of Alexander Solzhenitsyn

By JOHN TRAIN

When Alexander Solzhenitsyn came to America nine years ago, the then incumbent of the White House declined to see him. Such a gesture might annoy the Soviets, it was thought.

I recently accompanied Mr. Solzhenitsyn and his wife to England. What a difference! He was welcomed by the royal family, addressed over a thousand notables in London's Guildhall to acknowledge the Templeton Prize, spent an evening with the archbishop of Canterbury, was pictured on the front pages conferring with Prime Minister Thatcher and brought a roar of approval from the boys of Eton after addressing them in chapel. Television coverage was extensive. The Times of London printed his Guildhall address in full and carried a long editorial on it. Day after day the Times ran a stream of letters; its eminent editorialist Bernard Levin wrote a column, and later consecrated an entire page to an interview.

The American press, although present, virtually ignored these events. Indeed, says Mr. Solzhenitsyn, the Washington Post through selective editing misrepresented his message. What does he in fact have to say? And why are his words so differently received in the two countries?

The families of the Russian dissidents are exceedingly close to Mr. Solzhenitsyn's heart, and in his London talks he often turned, anguished, to their plight. In the Soviet Union a husband and wife can still barely support a family even if both work. When a dissident, exercising his rights under the Helsinki agreement (which Mr. Solzhenitsyn had always warned the Soviets would ignore), is sent to prison, his wife alone may no longer be able to earn enough to feed the children and herself. Ordinarily, the wives are also deprived of work, and heavy official disfavor falls on any who help such families. So their situation is desperate.

## Reasons of Conscience

While still in Zurich in 1974, after leaving Russia but before coming to America, Mr. Solzhenitsyn created the Russian Social Fund to help the families of Russian dissidents imprisoned, contrary to the Soviet Constitution, for reasons of conscience. To this fund of which his wife is president, Mr. Solzhenitsyn assigned all the proceeds of "The Gulag Archipelago," his most valuable asset.

The fund has assisted many hundreds of families, including more than a thousand children. Its directors inside Russia, who look after the distribution of what is brought in (perforce unofficially), are heroes and martyrs, like a doctor who works on during a plague knowing that sooner or later he must fall victim himself. Such is the hatred of freedom in the Soviet Union that helping the families of prisoners of conscience to stay alive has been declared an act of treason. In 1981 Valery Repin, who ran the fund in Leningrad, was seized and flung into solitary confinement for over a year of the KGB's inimitable treatment, after which, broken, he was exhib-

ited on television to "confess" that the fund was engaged in a witches' brew of anti-state machinations. It was all a fake, since the fund, a Swiss—i.e., neutral—foundation, is purely philanthropic. Mr. Repin has been tried and convicted. The fund's chief Soviet Union representative, Sergei Khodorovich, has just been arrested also. If he, too, can be broken, he may be subjected to a show trial. If, as seems more likely since he is a man of spiritual strength, he stands fast, then, condemned in secret, he will disappear. His only hope is Western public opinion. If we manifest enough concern in the media and in Washington, he may be saved.

A successor, Andrei Kistyakovsky, has stepped into Mr. Khodorovich's place, an act of extraordinary courage. Mr. Kistyakovsky's time of travail has yet to come. "Do you believe," I asked Mr. Solzhenitsyn, "that the Soviet government is in-

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deed a 'focus of evil,' to use President Reagan's words?"

"Of course. But nobody has a monopoly on evil or good. There is also evil in the West. Still, the Soviet government is the home of communism, and communism is the most dreadful engine of oppression on our planet. Besides bringing about the annihilation of tens of millions, and the physical and spiritual crushing of countless more, it has destroyed the Soviet economy. And no conqueror in history has taken over so much territory."

Does Andropov represent a change?

"Not in the least. I am constantly struck by the ignorance of so-called experts on Soviet matters, who seem to think that the change of one face, or many faces, in the Kremlin can possibly affect how Soviet communism will act. This is a naive view of communism, not based on observation. The only thing that would change the behavior of the Soviet Union would be the accession to power of a noncommunist leader. He would reverse Soviet policy, both domestically and internationally."

What have been the West's chief mistakes?

"Since 1918, the West has made only mistakes, one after another, in dealing with the Soviet Union. Since the discovery of the atomic bomb it had just one good idea—the Baruch Plan, to put the atom under international control—which Stalin brushed aside.

"Sixty-five years ago Lenin pronounced a sentence of death on the Western world. Sixty years ago nobody seriously supported the Russian forces fighting communism. There was a torrent of fugitives, including some of the finest persons in the country, who testified that what was happening was unprecedented, horrible. Rather than listen to them, the West listened to Bernard Shaw. Forty years ago, after the war,

there was a second wave of emigrants, bearing witness to Stalin's mass murders. Again, the West was indifferent. Thirty years ago, Kravchenko defected, revealing to the West the terrible things that were going on; people preferred to listen to Bertrand Russell. Eight or nine years ago I described what was really happening—and again, except for a few, the West paid no attention. At that time, I proposed specific political remedies for the desperate problems we face. Nothing was done. Now it is probably too late.

"The single worst mistake of the post-war era was relying on the 'nuclear umbrella.' False confidence in this 'umbrella' relaxed the West, sapping its strength, its moral qualities, its courage. Freedom does not depend on any 'umbrella,' it depends on stout hearts and steadfast men. Today the 'umbrella,' neutralized, no longer protects, but the habit of weakness, of lack of

courage, persists. As a result, the West lies gravely weakened before the expansionist aims of the Soviet Union."

What next?

"It is far better to fight on your feet than on your knees, but you can still fight on your knees. The Russian people are still resisting after 65 years. One man in the Soviet Union wrote me to urge Western scientists to invent a do-it-yourself copying machine. In a dictatorship, that would be a lot more valuable than an arms cache."

What hope is there, then, for the West?

"The time when the West could save itself by its own exertions may already have passed. To save itself would require a complete change in its attitudes, when in fact these attitudes are still going the wrong way. Instead of girding itself for struggle, the West is still hoping for outside forces to save it, through some kind of miracle . . . perhaps a miracle in the Kremlin. Solidarity was hailed as such a miracle. But the only miracle that the people of the West can pray for is a profound change in their own hearts."

And what about Afghanistan?

"In the three years of Soviet aggression against that country, the West has in essence done nothing. Had it dared, it could by now have supported several regiments of ex-Soviet soldiers—defectors—who would be ready to fight against this aggression. Then things would look very different."

Could Western broadcasting to the Soviet Union be more effective?

"Yes. In fact, that is a matter of the greatest importance. Today, all broadcasts into the Soviet Union are shackled by the naive and idealistic concept that we need above all to have good relations with the

Soviet government: not to vex the Kremlin. As long as this delusion is considered a prime policy objective, the Western governments will be responsible for undermining their own world. Such broadcasting is currently bound by a narrow limitation: It should say nothing against Lenin, it should never insult the Soviet government. This policy is insane. Almost every man, woman and child in Russia is sick of Leninism. The West, standing on the brink of catastrophe, has immensely strong allies of which it makes no use: the people of the Soviet Union, and, indeed, of the other subject nations. It must stretch out its hands to those oppressed people."

## 'A Need for Selflessness'

Is the Soviet Union serious about arms control?

"There are two Soviet Unions. The people—millions of them—dream of an end to wars, to armaments. The government, on the contrary, does not contemplate that idea even for a minute. It does, of course, want the West to disarm. But not one item of Soviet military equipment will ever be given up."

What about our younger people and their concern for disarmament?

"It is normal to be afraid of nuclear weapons. I would condemn no one for that. But the generation now coming out of Western schools is unable to distinguish good from bad. Even those words are unacceptable. This results in impaired thinking ability. Isaac Newton, for example, would never have been taken in by communism! These young people will soon look back on photographs of their own demonstrations and cry. But it will be too late. I say to them: You are protesting nuclear arms. But are you prepared to try to defend your homeland with nonnuclear arms? No: These young people are unprepared for any kind of struggle."

Do we have a single main underlying moral ill that one can identify?

"Besides cowardice, selfishness. We hear a constant clamor for rights, rights, always rights, but so very little about responsibility. And we have forgotten God. The need now is for selflessness, for a spirit of sacrifice, for a willingness to put aside personal gains for the salvation of the whole Western world."

Such, then, is Mr. Solzhenitsyn's message. It was received in England as an inspiring evocation of ancient values.

In America, Mr. Solzhenitsyn is often taken as a repetitious Cassandra, whose concerns need not be faced, because even if true, they're not new. As the hostile tide rises around us, we would rather, as he says, hope to be saved by some miracle.

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