

'My Hands Are Burning'

The Man

"August 1914," Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's latest novel, which has been banned in Russia, was published last month in Paris by a small émigré Russian house, the YMCA Press. Solzhenitsyn himself had made the bold decision to establish the book's copyright in France. In an epilogue to the book, the author wrote that he had been unable to stoop to the "indignity" of observing the Soviet censors' dictate that the G in God be written in lower case, while K.G.B. (the initials of the State Security Committee, the secret police) must be capitalized.

This was the first time that Solzhenitsyn had ever authorized the publication of one of his banned books abroad. His Swiss lawyer gave world rights to the West German publisher, Luchterhand Verlag. Luchterhand has been accepting bids from American and European publishers—some well over the \$500,000 mark—for the rights to translate this inevitable best seller.

Such an action seemed both unnecessary and unseemly in the case of Solzhenitsyn, who is forbidden to receive his foreign royalties in Russia. Moreover, his personal asceticism and dislike of Western commercial practices are well known.

"Beyond money, there is literature," he wrote with undoubted sincerity when berating Bodley Head, the British house, and other foreign publishers for bringing out "The Cancer Ward" against his will in 1968. Last week came the surprising news that Bodley Head had won English-language publishing rights to "August 1914" in tandem with Farrar, Straus & Giroux in the United States.

Although Solzhenitsyn's action may endanger his already precarious position in Russia, he cannot be plausibly accused of violating Soviet law. The articles of the criminal code under which other Soviet writers were condemned require proof that the author "disseminated" works that "defame the Soviet political and social system." Solzhenitsyn's new novel has nothing to do with the Soviet system. It is concerned with 11 days during the catastrophic Czarist Army offensive in East Prussia in August, 1914.

Still, it is inconceivable that such a novel could be published in the Soviet Union today, even if the author were an obscure



Drawings by Wilson in The Observer, London

Solzhenitsyn: "Beyond money, there is literature."

at Tannenberg.

"August 1914," like "War and Peace," contains splendid battle scenes, as well as descriptions of military dispositions that some of Solzhenitsyn's readers, like Tolstoy's, may find tedious. An incalculable amount of scholarly research is evidenced in both books in spite of the fact that in Solzhenitsyn's case, as he says in his epilogue, "any collection of materials that is available to others in my country is barred to me."

For 35 years now, Solzhenitsyn has been possessed by the idea of writing about August, 1914. Until recently, he says, he was "diverted" from this task by the "overwhelming nature" of intervening concerns—the Stalinist prisons and camps, where he served eight years, and his bout with cancer. Prison or disease, then, have been the themes of his earlier works, "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," "The Cancer Ward" and "The First Circle."

The Concept

The subject of men at war is not new for Solzhenitsyn in the sense that all his major books are concerned with the behavior of men in extreme situations. But until now, he has minutely recorded only situations of which he had the most intimate and terrible knowledge and described characters whose prototypes he had encountered in real life. This technique has given Solzhenitsyn