

# BOOKS AND THE ARTS

## The epic Archipelago: Gulag III

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The Gulag Archipelago, Volume 3, by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Harper and Row, 558 pp., \$17.

WITH THE PUBLICATION of Volume III (Books 5-7), Solzhenitsyn's 2,000-page saga of the Soviet methods of arrest, interrogation, and punishment is now complete. "It is the epic of our times," wrote the Paris newspaper *Le Monde* after the first publication of the *Gulag* in Paris (in Russian). "An epic is the creation of an entire people written by one person who has the creative power and

the genius to become the spokesman for his nation. And in this work, we hear a people speaking through the impassioned, intrepid, ironic, furious, lyrical, brutal, and often tender voice of the narrator."

*Gulag I* was on the best-seller lists in the United States for several months after its publication in English in 1974. It has been translated and is still being translated into many languages. The word "Gulag," an acronym of the Russian words referring to the Soviet penal system, has become international, known and recognized in most of the languages of the West. There are also far fewer apologists for the Soviet system today than there were even ten years ago; most of its former proponents have now denounced it or remain uncomfortably silent. Only a few die-hards like Lillian Hellman, who fought Nazism but has not recanted her Stalinism, and Angela Davis, who, when asked about the civil rights of Czech dissenters after the Soviet takeover in 1968, replied, "Let them rot in prison! They deserve it!" are left to defend the Soviet tyranny. That this is so is due largely to the monumental achievement of one man, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Solzhenitsyn is far from

being the first person to call the West's attention to the nature of the Soviet penal system. Even in the 1930s, American engineers, lured by Soviet gold, went to Russia, saw aspects of the system at work, and wrote articles about it. Many witnessed the forced collectivization of the kulaks — a village would be surrounded by barbed wire and machine guns, all the grain would be hauled out and none permitted in, and everyone inside would die of starvation. In that way Stalin got rid of more than five million of his alleged enemies. There were murmurs of dissent in the United States when America joined the U.S.S.R. in the war effort, but they were swept aside in the tide of Allied victory.

In 1948, Professor David Dallin's book *Forced Labor in Soviet Russia* was published by Yale University Press — a detailed and scholarly work, with interviews, maps, and data on the 127 known complexes of labor camps. In the face of a 50 percent annual mortality rate from cold, starvation, disease, and brutality, most of the victims never lived to tell the tale (including those who engineered the projects, who were shot on various pretexts before they could return to Moscow). There was an amnesty for Polish prisoners (in exchange for Allied favors) and hundreds of these prisoners testified, independently of each other, to the unspeakable brutality of life within the camps. But as painstaking and scholarly, even dramatic, as it was, the book caused scarcely a ripple, and many in America still agreed with Howard Fast that "a true brotherhood of man has emerged in the Soviet Union."

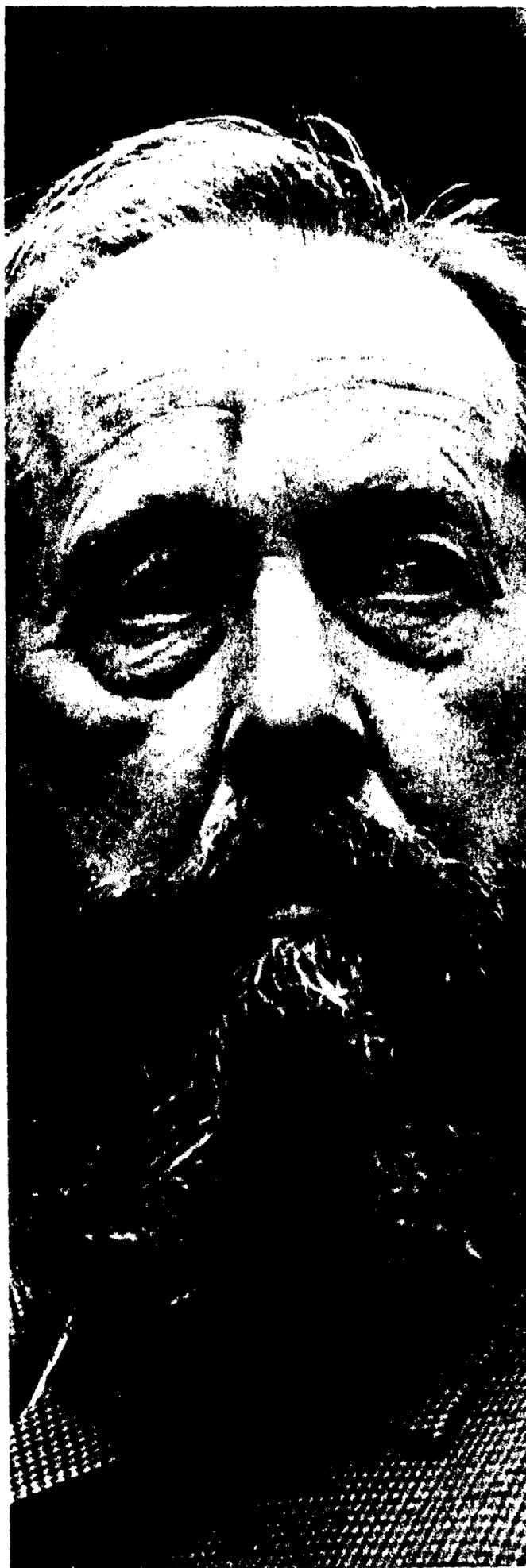
More and more evidence to the contrary continued to appear, however. There

were numerous autobiographical accounts of experiences with Soviet methods of arrest, detention, and interrogation, some from ex-prisoners and some from defected Soviet officials; e.g., *I Was an NKVD Agent*, by Anatoly Granovsky; (1962); *Magadan*, by Michael Solomon (1971); *My Testimony*, by Anatoly Marchenko; *Alexander Dolgun's Story* (An American in the Gulag) (1975); Isaac Levine's *Eyewitness to History* (1971); *Inside the KGB*, by Alexei Myagkov (1978), and others. There were detailed accounts by outsiders collected from numerous sources, such as John Barron's *KGB* (1974); exposes of American-British collaboration in the forcible repatriation of Russian nationals to certain death in their "homeland" after World War II, such as Julius Epstein's *Operation Keelhaul* (1973); and equally detailed accounts of anti-Soviet Russian armies toward the end of World War II, such as Sven Steenberg's *Vlasov* and Huxley Blythe's *The East Came West*. In 1963 there appeared an intensely dramatic volume of true short stories about the slave camps in the Kolyma region of Siberia, *Gamalis and Other Stories*, by a former KGB official there, Vladimir Andreyev. And, of course, there were Solzhenitsyn's own novels, *The First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, and *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, of which only the last-named was published in the Soviet Union, during the early days of the "Khrushchev thaw." Of all these, only Solzhenitsyn's novels made a dent in public opinion in the West prior to the appearance of the *Gulag*.

The most detailed and scholarly of all the works on the Soviet system is

probably *The Great Terror* (1965) by the British poet-historian Robert Conquest. It describes in gruesome detail (and documents with almost a hundred pages of footnotes) the full horror of the Soviet tyranny under Stalin: the assassinations, the phony trials and executions, the slave labor camps. It is more than sufficiently researched to satisfy even the most skeptical historian. Some of the incidents it relates, such as the visit by Henry Wallace and Owen Lattimore to one of the worst of these camp complexes, Kolyma, and their praise of these camps (which admittedly had been "doctored up" for their visit), are so bizarre that but for the elaborate documentation few would have believed the accounts. (In a novel, they would have been put down as "too improbable.") Together these books provide a damning and decisive indictment of the multifaceted Soviet tyranny. There is no longer any room for doubt. For those who are willing and able to read and investigate, the evidence is detailed and massive, and there is no longer any rational possibility of denying it. Within the last month Robert Conquest's new book, *Kolyma* (on the slave-system in the northeastern Siberian gold mines) has appeared to cap all the other accounts. Those who want to see totalitarianism in a favorable light must now turn to China, whose record (64 million deaths by Mao's own admission) is apparently even worse. Only in the groves of academe is it still fashionable to praise the tyranny in China and to consider Solzhenitsyn an embarrassment, or to act as if he had never existed.

What Solzhenitsyn's great non-fictional work adds to the accounts al-



ready written is primarily twofold: hundreds upon hundreds of incidents, eyewitness accounts of brutality and corruption, torture and killing, suffering and heroism, which do not appear (at least not these specific incidents) in other works; and the dramatic power of a great novelist, who is able not only to cite facts and statistics, but to bring home to the reader in the most powerful and often heart-rending way the full agony and heroism of the individual sufferers. It is his spell-binding narrative power that has captured the imagination of millions of readers round the world, and aroused at last the moral indignation of readers who had previously believed that the Nazi camps had been the ultimate in degradation and cruelty.

I reviewed the first volume of the *Gulag* in the September 1974 issue of *Libertarian Review*. But *Gulag II* was never reviewed in *LR*, so I shall combine some comments on this work with those on the newly published *Gulag III*.

While *Gulag I* was concerned with the processes of arrest, interrogation, torture, and trial in the Soviet penal system, *Gulag II* and *III* are concerned primarily with the "corrective labor camps" and, for those who survived these, the years of exile following upon the labor sentences. Here and there through the long narrative, Solzhenitsyn intersperses his own personal experiences. For he himself, a soldier in World War II, was arrested when a letter of his criticizing Stalin was read by Soviet officials, and he spent eight years in various labor camps, followed by years of exile in Kazakhstan which are described powerfully in *Gulag III*.

Throughout most of the

Stalin period, beginning about 1928, the population of the slave labor camps averaged between 12 and 15 million people. In the early years, and again during World War II, the annual death rate averaged almost half the prisoners who became sick from malnutrition, overwork, or exposure to cold (-70°F in some cases) had their rations cut — the state had no more use for them — and they simply died by the thousands.

One of the first large-scale Soviet projects was the building of the Belmoral Canal, from Leningrad to the White Sea. "Stalin simply needed a great construction project somewhere which would devour many working hands and many lives—the surplus of people as a result of the liquidation of the kulaks—with the reliability of a gas execution van but more cheaply . . ." (*Gulag II*, 86) The engineers said, "We must make the structure of concrete." The Soviet government said: "There is not enough time." The engineers said: "We need large quantities of iron." The Soviet government said: "Replace it with wood." The engineers said: "We need tractors, cranes, machinery." The Soviet government said: "There can be none of that . . . do it all by hand." "The engineers were put to work making a plan before the surveys had been made on the ground," Solzhenitsyn writes. "Trainloads of prisoners arrived at the canal site before there were any barracks there, or supplies, or tools, or a plan; it was already autumn. There were no drafting papers, no rulers, no thumbtacks, no light in the work barracks." From camps in central Asia, they brought tribesmen of minority groups (whom Stalin would eliminate

after he had used up their labor) into the subzero cold. The normal day's task was to break up two-and-a-half cubic yards of granite and move it a hundred yards in a wheelbarrow. And the snow kept falling and covering everything up:

The ugly depression, powdered over with snow, was full of people and stones. They bent over, two or three of them together and taking hold of a boulder, tried to lift it. The boulder did not move. They called a fourth and fifth. But at this point the technology of our glorious century came to their aid: they dragged the boulder out of the excavation with a net—the net being hauled by a cable, and the cable in turn by a drum turned by a horse. And they used wooden cranes for lifting stones . . .

They were hurled from the 20th century into the age of the caveman . . . And how were trees to be felled if there were neither saws nor axes? Ropes were tied around the trees, and they were rocked back and forth by brigades (of slaves) pulling in different directions—they rocked the trees out. After all, the canal was being built on the initiative and instructions of Comrade Stalin! This was written in the newspapers and repeated on the radio every day . . . No, it would be unjust, to compare this most savage construction project of the 20th century, this canal built with wheelbarrow and pick, with the Egyptian pyramids; after all, the pyramids were built with contemporary technology! And we used the technology of 40 centuries earlier! . . . Make use of the technology of the caveman, but bear the responsibility according to the rules of the 20th century: if it leaks anywhere, "off with your head!" And thousands of engineers were purged who were just doing the best they could. (II, 89)

The canal was at last completed. And more than 100,000 prisoners perished in the building of it. But this is far from the worst Solzhenitsyn describes:

"In the goldfields of northeast Siberia, they sent out 500 people to drive prospecting shafts to a depth of 25 to 30 feet in the permafrost. They completed them. Half the prisoners died before this had been done. It was time to start blasting, but they changed their minds: the metal content was low. They abandoned it. Next May the prospecting shafts thawed, and all the work was lost. And two years later, again in March, in the Kolyma frosts, they had another brainstorm: to drive prospecting shafts! in the very same place! urgently! don't spare lives!" (II, 585).

Solzhenitsyn devotes an entire chapter to the large experimental camp in the 1920s in the Solovetsky Islands near Murmansk; people there were used as guinea pigs to test exposure to cold and impossible conditions of labor, and the cells in the disbanded monasteries in these islands were used as dungeons and torture-chambers. These experiments set the pattern for the hundreds of camps that spread out like sores all over the face of Russia during the 1930s. The horrifying drama of these experiments with human lives, which gradually spread out over the whole five thousand miles east to Kamchatka, is dramatically recounted in *Gulag II* and *III*. Most of this material is unrelievedly depressing, and cannot be read in long stretches, but its cumulative effect is shattering.

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### The resultant morality

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More gripping even than the description of conditions in the labor camps is the effect on the morality, not only of the inmates, but of the entire civilian population of the U.S.S.R.

With the KGB able to act with virtually total autonomy, everyone is at the mercy of this organization, whose employees receive several times the wages of the highest paid workers in Russia; it is as if the criminals and murderers of a nation were to be released from the prisons and left to do as they liked with the nonprison population. The wicked prosper. The one who denounces another for not listening to a speech by Stalin is the one who wins, never the one who is denounced (who is shot or sent to 25 years in a labor camp—a sentence which few survive). Absolute secrecy even among intimates is essential: Many men owe their lives to not telling even their wives or mothers about their ideas, since in a domestic quarrel the wife could always report it and have the husband sent to Siberia, while she occupies his house. Betrayal becomes, in this horribly inverted moral scheme, the only way to survive.

The mildest and most widespread form of betrayal was not to do anything bad directly, just not to notice the doomed person next to one, not to help him, to turn away one's face, to shrink back. They had arrested a neighbor, your comrade at work, or your close friend; you sit in silence. You acted as if you had not noticed. After all, you could not afford to lose your job! And then it was announced at work, at a general meeting, that the person, who had disappeared the day before, was an inveterate enemy of the people. And you, who had bent your back beside him for 20 years at the same desk, now by your noble silence, or even your condemning speech, had to show how hostile you were to his crimes. You had to make this sacrifice for the sake of your own dear family, for your own dear ones! what right had you not to think about THEM? But the person arrested had left behind him a wife, a mother, children, perhaps at least

these ought to be helped? No, no, that would be dangerous; after all, these were the wife of an "enemy" and the mother of an "enemy", and the children of an "enemy"—and your own children had a long education ahead of them!" (II, 737)

A mother and little children were being taken to the railroad station by the police to be sent into exile. "All of a sudden, when they went through the station, the small boy, aged 8, disappeared. The policemen wore themselves out looking for him but couldn't find him. So they exiled the family without the boy. And what had happened was that he dived under the red cloth wound around the high pedestal beneath the bust of Stalin, and he sat there till the danger passed. And then he returned home—where the apartment was sealed shut. He went to neighbors, and to friends of his parents; no one took him in, they refused even to let him spend the night! And so he turned himself in at an orphanage." (II, 678)

The *permanent lie* becomes the only safe form of existence. Every wag of the tongue can be overheard by someone; every facial expression observed by someone. "A shake of the head instead of a nod might cost you resettlement in the archipelago . . . . [And] your children were growing up. If they weren't old enough, you and your wife had to avoid saying openly in front of them what you really thought; after all, they were being brought up in the schools to . . . betray their own parents . . . . And if the children were too little, then you had to decide what was the best way to bring them up: whether to start them off on lies instead of the truth—so that it would be easier for them to live—and then to lie forevermore in front of them too; or to

tell them the truth, with the risk that they might sometime make a slip, that they might let it out, which meant that you had to instill into them from the start that the truth was murderous, that beyond the threshold of the house you had to lie, only to lie, just like their father and mother." (II, 646)

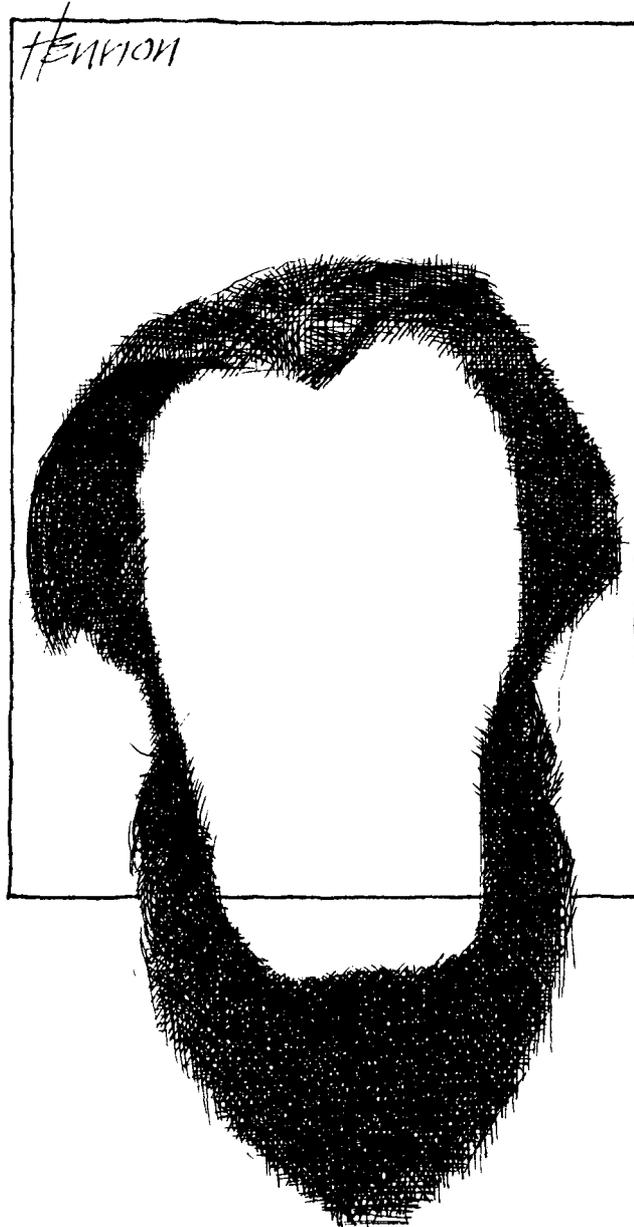
are taught the official doctrine, and are required to denounce their parents and call them traitors.

There are children in the labor camps also; Article 12 of the Criminal Code permits children from the age of 12 to be sentenced. Forty-eight percent of the prisoners in the labor camps were (and are, ac-

of juveniles are arrested ("Just give us the person, we'll invent the crime") and sent there. A boy of 12 was sentenced to death for getting drunk and taking a ride around the block on an officer's horse. A group of juveniles was given 25-year sentences in the Gulag for putting objects on railroad tracks. When mistakes were made in farm or factory from carelessness—that is, unintentionally—their makers were given the full sentence. When a 13-year-old, having worked on the state farm the entire day, took some wheat from alongside the road for the use of his own family, he was caught and sentenced to 25 years for stealing state property. Children who filled their pockets with potatoes from the state farm, to keep themselves from being hungry, were given eight years. (II, 450). The children who ran away from Factory Apprenticeship Training were sentenced, too: They were assigned to dump the excrement from the latrines. The children were hitched up like horses to carts containing barrels of this sludge, and the guards urged them on with clubs.

The children of the parents who had gone before usually ended up in prisons or in labor camps themselves, later on. "There was an eighth grade girl, Nina. They came to arrest her father in November 1941. There was a search. Suddenly she remembered that inside the stove lay a crumpled but not yet burned humorous rhyme. She decided she must tear it up at once. She reached into the firebox; but the dozing policeman grabbed her. And here was the sacrilege she had written:

*The stars in heaven  
are shining down  
And their light falls  
on the dew.*



**Alexandr Solzhenitsyn**

Children, of course, are taken away from their parents at any time the state chooses, particularly if they are accused of being dissenters or religious believers. The children are then brought up in state orphanages; they never see their parents again; they

according to Solzhenitsyn, as of 1966) under 24 years old. They are often the strongest workers, able to last longest under impossible conditions of cold and overwork and exposure, and when large contingents of labor are needed at a certain place, vast numbers

*Smolensk is already  
lost and gone  
And we're going to  
lose Moscow too.*

And of course these full-grown men engaged in saving their Motherland had to stop such dangerous thoughts." She was arrested and sentenced to eight years—first in prison, and then in a labor camp. But she survived. Her father was sent to a different camp, of course. They never sent members of a family to the same camp. You didn't last long in Russia in a logging camp; it's the same as a sentence of death. The work norms at these camps were totally impossible to fulfill, no matter how strong you were or how hard you worked, and if you didn't fulfill, the whole work-brigade was punished by receiving even less bread and gruel than the starvation rations they'd had before. Sixteen hours of work a day, plus a three mile walk to the forest and three miles back. Of course the camp administration was merciful: The work day was shorter when the temperature was lower than 60 below zero. But then the work had to be made up later. Anyway, there were hundreds who simply froze to death on such days; and the ones who were left couldn't walk any longer, and were straining every sinew to crawl along on all fours on the way back to camp (to get their pitiful cupful of gruel). These the convoy simply shot. And that is why the little girl's father died a few months after he was sentenced to a logging camp.

But for those found guilty of article 58—that is, political crimes—no minimum age existed: In Lithuania there were six-year-old children taken from their parents (II, 463) and sent to the labor camp. The offense? Writing a

paper in school in defense of the independence of Lithuania. And in the course of the liquidation of the kulaks, thousands of little children, after their parents were shot or deported to the camps, were simply thrown out to die. And millions upon millions of children were and are orphaned by the arrest of their parents.

Here is [a little girl] Galya. She remembers very well her sixth birthday in 1933. The family celebrated it joyfully. The next morning she woke up. Her father and mother were gone, strangers were in the house. Her father had been taken out and shot. Her mother had been taken to prison; there she died a month later. The girl was taken to an orphanage in a monastery near Tobolsk. Conditions there were such that the young girls lived in constant fear of violence . . . . The director [of the orphanage] talked to her: "You are the children of enemies of the people, and nonetheless you are being clothed and fed!" . . . Galya became like a wolf cub. At the age of 11 she was already given her first political interrogation. Being of independent mind, she got a ten-year sentence. She actually managed to survive it. Today in her 40s, she lives a lonely life in a town far up in the Arctic, and she writes, "My life came to an end with my father's arrest. I love him so much to this very day that I am afraid to even think about it. My heart is sick with love for him. [The day they took him away] they took all our things out into the street and sat me there on top of them, and a heavy rain was falling. I have been sick at heart every day since then. From the age of six I have been daughter of 'a traitor to the Motherland.'" (II, 464)

But most of the children who were sent to the labor camps did not turn out even so happily as this. What do you expect would happen to them in the dog-eat-dog conditions of the camp, where stealing was required for the barest survival? Solzhenitsyn writes:

Out in freedom they had understood very well that life was built upon injustice. But out there some of it was dressed up in decent clothing, and some of it was softened by a mother's kind word. In the Archipelago the children saw the world as it is seen by animals: only might makes right! only the beast of prey has the right to live! . . . . Children accepted the Archipelago with the divine impressionability of childhood. And in a few DAYS children became beasts there—the worst kind of beasts, with no ethical concepts whatever . . . . The child masters the truth: if other teeth are weaker than your own, then tear the piece (of bread) away from them. It belongs to you! . . . Well what could you expect? No child could avoid being cooked in this mash. No child could remain a separate individual—he would be trampled, torn apart, if he didn't steal and maim to survive. (And imagine your own child in this place!) (II, 452)

The mess hall at this camp was a plank lean-to not adequate for the Siberian winter. The gruel and the bread ration had to be carried about 150 yards in the cold from the kitchen to the dugout. For the elderly this was a dangerous and difficult operation. They pushed their bread ration far down inside their shirt and gripped their mess tin with freezing hands. But suddenly, with diabolical speed, two or three children would attack from the side. They knocked one old man to the ground, six hands frisked him over, and they made off like a whirlwind. His bread ration (10 oz. a day) had been pilfered, his gruel spilled, his empty mess tin lay there on the ground, and the old man struggled to get to his knees . . . . And the weaker the victim the more merciless were the children. They openly tore the bread ration from the hands of a very weak old man. The old man wept and implored them to give it back to him: "I'm dying of starvation," he said. "So you're going to die soon anyway—what's the difference?" And the children went on, attacking the sick: the gang (of children) would hurl their vic-

tim to the ground, sit on his hands, his legs, and his head, take his food and what clothing they wanted [until the guards, after they'd stopped being amused, came at them with clubs]. (II, 458)

The children's chief weapon became the slingshot: that is, the index and middle fingers of the hand parted in a "V" sign—like butting horns. But they were not for butting. They were for gouging. They were always aimed at the eyes. Among the children this became a favorite dangerous game: all of a sudden like a snake's head a "slingshot" arises out of nowhere in front of an old man's eyes, and the fingers move steadily toward the eyes. The old man recoils. He is pushed in the chest, and another child has already knelt on the ground behind his legs; and the old man falls backwards, his head banging on the ground, accompanied by the laughter of the children." (II, 462)

And there was retaliation against the children, too. One man Solzhenitsyn describes worked out a method for getting rid of some of them in secret: "He would creep up on a child, hurl him to the ground and press down on the boy's chest with his knees until he could hear the ribs crack—but he didn't break them. He would let the child up at that point. The child wouldn't survive long, and there wasn't a physician who could diagnose what was wrong with him. And in this way the man sent several children to the next world before they themselves ganged up on him and beat him to death."

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### Attempts at escape

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The first hundred pages or so of *Gulag III* show signs of being written in haste; the narrative is sometimes jerky and discontinuous. (*Gulag II* is, by all odds, the best of the three.) The author himself apologizes for this in an Afterword: "Never once

did this whole book, in all its parts, lie on the same desk at the same time. In September 1965, when work on the Archipelago was at its most intensive, I suffered a setback: my archive was raided and my novel [*The First Circle*] impounded. At this point the parts of the Archipelago already written, and the materials for the other parts, were scattered, and never reassembled." (III, 526-7)

But for those readers who found *I* and *II* continuously depressing, *III* presents, much of the time, a considerable contrast, largely because of its subject matter. Much of *Gulag III* deals with escape attempts; and even though almost all attempts at escape were unsuccessful, and the escapers knew that the chances of bringing it off were thousands to one, the reader identifies with their heroism in the face of great odds. I did not think that any story of escape attempts could possibly match the powerful tale of attempted escape from the Kolyma, in the opening story of Andreyev's *Gamalis*; but the story of Georgi Tenno in Chapter 7 of Book 5 (*Gulag III*) matches it. All of them would make stunning movies, but it is very unlikely that any films will ever be made from these true stories.

Solzhenitsyn's tales of individual valor are sometimes interspersed with comments of his own—a habit which some readers may find irritating. Yet they add a kind of cosmic dimension to the narrative. In one tale of escape through the deserts near the Aral Sea, the prisoners go more than a week without water, until they find and kill a horse and drink directly from its wounds—at which point Solzhenitsyn remarks, "Partisans of peace! That very year you were loudly in

session in Vienna or Stockholm, and sipping cocktails through straws. Did it occur to you that compatriots of the versifier Tikhonov and the journalist Ehrenburg were sucking the blood of dead horses? Did they explain to you in their speeches that that was the meaning of peace, Soviet style?" (III, 195)

And when he has described the brutal torture of one prisoner, a pacifist, Solzhenitsyn remarks, "Had he been brought into the world by the State? Why, then, had the State usurped the right to decide how this man should live?" And then he adds, "We don't mind having a fellow countryman called Leo Tolstoy. It's a good trademark. It even makes a good postage stamp. Foreigners can be taken on trips to Yasnaya Polyana. We are always ready to drool over his opposition to Tsarism and his excommunication (the announcer's voice will tremble at this point). But, my dear countrymen, if someone takes Tolstoy seriously, if a real live Tolstoyan springs up among us—look out! Don't fall under our caterpillar tracks!" (III, 110)

Very little has been written about exiled populations. Banishment under the Soviets was not as in Czarist days, to Irkutsk, with all one's wealth intact. "These peasants . . . were banished . . . not to a center of population, a place made habitable, but to the haunt of wild beasts, into the wilderness . . . Even in their primeval state our forbears at least chose places near water for their settlements . . . but for special settlements [the Soviet authorities] chose places on stony hillsides—100 meters up above the river Pinega, where it was impossible to dig down to water, and

nothing would grow in the soil. Three or four kilometers off there might be convenient water meadows—but no, according to instructions no one was supposed to settle there . . ."

Seventy thousand people were driven through Tomsk and "from there were driven farther, at first on foot, down the Tom although it was winter, then along the Ob, then upstream along the Vasyugan—still over the ice. The inhabitants of villages on the route were ordered out afterward to pick up the bodies . . . In the upper reaches of the Vasyugan and the Tara they were marooned on patches of firm ground in the marshes. No food or tools were left for them. The roads were impassable, and there was no way through to the world outside, except for two brushwood paths, one toward Tobolsk and one toward the Ob. Machine-gunners manned barriers on both paths and let no one through from the death camp . . . Desperate people came out to the barriers begging to be let through, and were shot on the spot . . . They died off—every one of them." (III, 363)

Almost half the populations of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were exiled in this way (III, 390-5), and the only reason they did not all die within the year was that parcels of food and supplies were permitted from their native lands. The exiled populations from other areas, with no one left back home to send them anything, fared differently—they were totally destroyed.

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### The final impact

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It is quite clear throughout this immense work that it was intended not pri-

marily for the West, but for readers inside the Soviet Union; it is his own countrymen that he wants to awaken to an awareness of these evils and a public renunciation of them. But the *Gulag* has never been permitted publication in the Soviet Union; until it is, Solzhenitsyn considers his main purpose in writing it to remain unachieved.

Yet the publication of *Gulag* in the West has changed history. John Lukacs, in his book *1945: Year Zero*, writes (quoted by George Will in *Newsweek*, June 12, 1978, p. 112):

Something happened in 1945, in a most unlikely place: in the pine forests of East Prussia . . . under the cap of a Soviet captain, into the gray fur of which the metallic red star was deeply impressed. A cold, crystalline thought which eventually led this man far, far enough to reject the entire mental system of the world in which he was born and in which he lived, to the point where the very rulers of that enormous empire began to worry about him and to fear him, while to many millions of other people he became that new thing, a Light from the East. Truly a single event in a single mind may change the world. It may even bring about—and not merely hasten—the collapse of the Communist system which is inevitable, though only in the long run. If so, the most important event in 1945 may not have been the division of Europe, and not the dawn of the atomic age, but the sudden opening and the sudden dawning of something in the mind of a ragged Soviet officer, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

The greatest significance of this work of Solzhenitsyn is that it presents to the world, more vividly and more ruthlessly than any work ever written, the final consequences of collectivism in practice. The excuse given for the camps, and for the entire Soviet penal system, is contained in the manual of instructions to trainees in the

KGB: "You must think of humanity—past, present, and future—as one great body that requires surgery. You cannot perform surgery without severing membranes, destroying tissue, spilling blood. Similarly, in intelligence we sometimes destroy individuals who are expendable tissues in the body of humanity. Occasionally we must perform unpleasant acts, even kidnapping and liquidation. But none of this is immoral. All acts that further socialism are moral acts." (John Barron, *KGB*, p. 366)

The definitive comment on this was made by Ayn Rand, in her essay on the consequences of the idea that "each of us is a part, who lives only to serve the whole"—if not in the present, then for the sake of some glorious future ("Collectivized Ethics," *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 84): "The waiting has no end. The unborn profiteers of that wholesale sacrificial slaughter will never be born. The sacrificial animals will merely breed new hordes of sacrificial animals—while the unfocused eyes of a collectivized brain will stare on, undeterred, and speak of his vision of service to mankind, mixing interchangeably the corpses of the present with the ghosts of the future, but seeing no *men*."

The long dark night of the Russian people has not yet ended. Khrushchev's exposés of the Stalinist atrocities resulted in a diminution of the number of people "chewed up" (Solzhenitsyn's term) by the "Soviet justice system." But to this day the torture chambers and the camps continue, easier than before on the thieves and murderers sent there but harder on the Section 58s (political prisoners)—Solzhenitsyn describes it in his penultimate chapter, "Rul-

ers Change, the Archipelago Remains." Even now more revelations appear: Early in 1978, converging evidence from various sources came to light concerning Wrangel Island, 100 miles north of Siberia in the Arctic Ocean. There, a complex of three extermination camps has been operating for years, with human experiments on cold survival, pain tolerance, and disease inoculation. The horror continues. Now in exile in the United States, Solzhenitsyn too would have been chewed up by the system but for his fame in the outside world; a man possessed, he continues to write, hoping to live until the day he may return to a saner Russia. Until the horror is over and the guilty exposed, he will have no rest. Nor, for that matter, should we. □

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## Marvelous charts, monstrous theories

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CHRISTOPHER WEBER

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The Golden Constant, by Roy Jastram. John Wiley and Sons, 229 pp; \$9.95

IN THE GOLDEN CONSTANT, Dr. Roy Jastram of UC Berkeley has given us one of the most unusual books to emerge recently from the economics establishment. In effect, if not in intention, Jastram's work makes a terrific, sweeping statistical case for the gold standard.

*The Golden Constant* is subtitled "The English and American Experience, 1560-1976." "Experience" here

means *price* experience. What Jastram has done is to painstakingly gather and compile a history of both English gold prices and English commodity prices over the past four centuries. He does the same with American prices from 1800 onward. His is an original, long-term wholesale price index, made possible by England's unique position among nations: For centuries England has had the same territory, has been free from invasion, and has kept the pound as her national money. The institutions whose centuries-old account books Jastram works with are often of a respectable character indeed: Westminster Abbey, Eton College, and Chelsea Hospital all had to buy wheat, bricks, cheese and cloth. And as for the price of gold, the English mint has continuous records dating back to 1343. For the past two centuries, with only short breaks, Jastram uses the London Market price—which is, of course, the most accurate price of all. Putting the two series together, Jastram then derives an index of gold's purchasing power over the centuries. He does the same for the American price experience, certainly an easier job with a young country. But the British results, with their longer sweep, are more useful. He uses 1930 as the base year, which equals 100. (1930 was the last year in which the Keynesian doctrine of inflationism was still not official British policy.)

The salient fact that emerges from the charts is this: Prices doubled between 1585 and 1718. Then they remained roughly stable for the next two hundred years, until 1930. Since that time, prices have rocketed to the stars, soaring an incredible 1,434 per cent!

The American record

has been similar, only less drastic. Our wholesale commodity index was, by this reckoning, 100 in 1804; it was 100 in 1930. As recently as 1940, it was 90.8. Then, a five-fold climb begins: 185.7 in 1948; 247.5 in 1970; and 410 in 1976, the year the calculations end. This is an almost 500 per cent jump.

One question leaps out at us after observing this centuries-long record. We must ask ourselves why two centuries, from 1718 to 1914, had price stability, with no inflation, an experience so unlike the few decades since then. (I have not included the years 1914-1930 in the "stable" period, for there was massive government intervention in prices during World War I and its aftermath.)

Why this stability? It was because the gold standard triumphed during both these centuries, the eighteenth and the nineteenth. It conspicuously did *not* in the centuries before and since. By "gold standard" I mean the idea that paper currency only represents a specific quantity of gold, that it has no value of its own, and, further, that this gold value cannot be changed by the whims of either kings or government central banks.

Gold and silver had circulated as money for centuries before 1718. But during earlier times, bullion coins were regarded as creatures of kings. The gold guinea, for example, was arbitrarily fixed at 20 shillings, but the marketplace valued it more highly. Kings kept shifting the "official" value up and down. They also clipped and shaved down the gold content of the coins for extra income, thus debasing the money. In short, they paid no respect to the weights of gold which the coins were supposed to represent. Until the eighteenth century, almost