

# Roy Medvedev

## Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago: Part Two

*We print here the first English translation of a discussion of Solzhenitsyn's Gulag, II by the distinguished Russian historian and intellectual dissident Roy Medvedev. Elsewhere in this issue, Peter Reddaway analyzes the exchanges of opinion going on among the Russian dissidents. We believe that the issues raised by people like Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, and Medvedev—including their differences of outlook—are among the most important political matters of our time. — Eds.*

**T**he second volume of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* has now appeared. Where the first volume consisted in a detailed investigation of everything that preceded the arrival of millions of Soviet people in Stalin's concentration camps—the system of arrests, the various forms of confinement, interrogation with torture, judicial and extrajudicial persecution, prisoner transports and transit prisons—the second volume gets down to the study of the primary and fundamental part of the Gulag empire, the corrective or, as Solzhenitsyn rightly calls them, the “destructive” labor camps. Here nothing escapes the author's attention: the origin and history of the camps, the economics of forced labor, the administrative structure, the categories of prisoners and everyday life of the inmates, the position of women and juveniles, the relations between ordinary zeks and the trusties,<sup>1</sup> between criminals and politicals, the camp guards, the convoy guards, the “information” service and the recruiting of stool pigeons, the system of punishments and “incentives,” the functioning of the hospitals and medical sta-

tions, the way prisoners died and were killed, and the unceremonious way they were buried—all these things find their place in Solzhenitsyn's book. The author describes the various types of hard labor and the starvation diet imposed on the zeks; he studies not only the world of the camps but also the world immediately surrounding them, the world of “campside”; and he surveys the peculiarities of psychology and behavior found among the prisoners and their jail keepers (or “camp keepers,” in Solzhenitsyn's terminology).

Like the first volume, which came out in December 1973, this volume deserves the highest estimation, especially because it is a conscientious investigation, artistically presented and based on authentic fact. True, the second volume did not have the moral shock effect of the first, did not stun and shake the reader so. Perhaps because it was the second volume; or perhaps, for me, this impression has to do with the fact that I have read dozens and dozens of memoirs by former camp inmates (most of them, of course, never published) and have recorded hundreds of accounts and pieces of testimony about camp life. It is also significant that, while the basic facts are reliable (and there are noticeably

<sup>1</sup>Zek: In camp slang, abbreviation of the Russian word for “prisoner,” *zaklyuchenny*.

fewer petty factual inaccuracies in the second volume of *Gulag Archipelago* than in the first), many of the author's judgments and opinions are too one-sided and categorical and his general observations are by no means always well-grounded. This is particularly true of the way he obviously lays his colors on too thickly in depicting the world of "the free" in his chapter "Our Muzzled Freedom."

But, of course, none of the shortcomings of the second volume overshadow the artistic and social significance of this book, which has no equal in all our literature on the camps.

Several years ago I heard of a certain occurrence from a former "son of Gulag" who had gone to visit Vorkuta as a free citizen (many such veterans of the camps feel the urge to visit the places where their years had been spent working behind barbed wire; Solzhenitsyn too writes about this). It was an occurrence common in those parts. A foundation pit for a new school in Vorkuta had been started.<sup>2</sup> No sooner had the thin topmost layer of soil been removed than the teeth of the excavating machines revealed a huge deposit of human bones. This was not of course the site of a primitive human settlement, and no archeologists came there. It was one of those giant mass graves that grew near the northern camps—great pits, already dug in the autumn, into which thousands of corpses were thrown during the winter—prisoners who died or were shot—to be covered over later on, with the arrival of the brief northern summer. Construction of the school was temporarily halted, not for the purpose, naturally, of setting up a monument to the unknown convicts; the freshly bared bones of these zeks were carted off by night and buried somewhere outside the city limits, and this new cemetery was not marked in any noticeable way. At the original site of the mass grave, school construction was resumed and completed.

<sup>2</sup>*Vorkuta*: One of the largest labor camp complexes of the Stalin era, mainly set up for mining the coal of the Pechora River basin in the arctic northeast of European Russia. The town of the same name, center of the region, was built by prisoner labor in 1931–32 and is now a city of nearly 100,000. The Vorkuta camps were apparently dismantled after major strikes by prisoners in 1953.

Alas, we can have little hope that memorials will be erected even where the largest concentration camps stood, or that the camp barracks, compounds, towers, and mines will be restored in museum form, or that some sort of markings will be placed at the countless camp cemeteries, where there are probably more Soviet people buried than fell in the war against Nazi Germany. There is little hope that an eternal flame will burn here or that the names of those who died and were killed will be chiseled in marble. It is quite possible that books will remain the only monuments to these people. One such book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, will easily outlive those who wish to suppress it and will stand as an unforgettable tribute for those to whom its author dedicated it, all those who perished in the camps, "all those who did not live to tell it."

### Camp Myths

IN OUR COUNTRY, where there is no freedom of the press or freedom of information, where most information circulates by certain secret channels, a multitude of rumors inevitably arise and dozens of different myths have public currency and are accepted by many as unquestionable truths. Under the conditions existing in the camps such legends, rumors, and myths—often far removed from reality—were all the more likely to find fertile ground. Natalya Reshetovskaya has recently contended that Solzhenitsyn's book is essentially based on this camp folklore.<sup>3</sup> That is certainly not so. Of course Solzhenitsyn, through no fault of his own, had no chance to check documentary evidence in order to verify much of the infor-

<sup>3</sup>*Natalya Reshetovskaya* (born 1920): Solzhenitsyn's first wife; they married in 1940, were separated by the war, then by his imprisonment in 1945; she divorced him in 1950 while he was in the camps. After his release and rehabilitation (1956–57), they remarried in the late 1950s, before he won fame with *Ivan Denisovich*. In the late 1960s they separated again, and he established a relationship with his present wife, Natalya Svetlova. The authorities, to harass him further, long supported Reshetovskaya in her refusal to agree to a divorce. They were finally divorced by the time he was expelled from the U.S.S.R. Reshetovskaya's memoirs were published outside the Soviet Union (English edition, *Sanya: My Life with Solzhenitsyn*, New York, 1975).

mation he obtained from fellow inmates and from subsequent correspondents and informants. However, both his own camp experience and his intuition as an investigator and an artist enable him in most cases to distinguish sharply enough between truth and invention in the accounts he has recorded. If some legends do crop up in the pages of *Gulag Archipelago*, rare as they may be, this happens for the most part when the topic is the distant past or the lives and "affairs" of those high up in the "organs," for example, Minister of State Security Abakumov.<sup>4</sup>

I think that among such myths we must include Solzhenitsyn's story of the 14-year-old boy who on June 20, 1929, during Gorky's visit to the Solovetsky Special Purpose Camp asked to speak with Gorky in private and then spent an hour and a half telling the famous writer about all the illegalities committed in that camp.<sup>5</sup> According to Solzhenitsyn's account, Gorky, after talking with the boy, left the room in tears. But not only did he do nothing for the prisoners at Solovki; he even praised the Solovetsky Cheka agents many times thereafter—while the truth-loving lad was shot the same night by those Chekists.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Viktor Semyonovich Abakumov (1894–1954): Minister of state security under Stalin and Beria, 1946–52: tried and executed after Stalin's death.

<sup>5</sup>Maxim Gorky (1868–1936): Prominent Russian writer who had close ties with Lenin and other Bolsheviks before the 1917 revolution. Critical of Soviet regime in its early years; often interceded with Lenin in behalf of threatened cultural and intellectual figures. After living in Western Europe, 1921–28, he returned to the U.S.S.R. and was highly favored by the Stalin regime. Died under mysterious circumstances, allegedly poisoned, on the eve of the first great Moscow show trial.

<sup>6</sup>Solovki, Solovetsky; Cheka, Chekist: Solovki is slang for the Solovetsky camp, on the Solovetsky Islands; see the description of the camp in *Gulag Archipelago*, vol. II, chap. 2.

The Cheka was the first Soviet state-security organization (1917–22). The acronym derives from the Russian initials Ch. and K., the official name being Chrezvychaynaya Kommissiya, or Extraordinary Commission. The state-security organs (secret police) were frequently renamed, and at various times known by such initials as GPU, OGPU, NKVD, MVD, MGB, and now KGB. But over the years *Chekist*, originally meaning member of the Cheka, has stayed on as an informal term for any Soviet secret police agent, regardless of the official initials at the time.

Now Solzhenitsyn himself writes that the first juveniles came to Solovki only in mid-March 1929. How could the newly arrived inhabitants of the children's colony, isolated from the adult prisoners, find out everything that had gone on at Solovki for years before? But if this particular anecdote related by Solzhenitsyn seems dubious, no such doubts arise over his own story of the many illegal and arbitrary actions committed at Solovki, a narrative that can be confirmed by other accounts and other witnesses.

### Where the Camps Came From

SOLZHENITSYN DATES the existence of concentration camps for political opponents in our country from 1918. This is not slander, as some of his detractors contend. Solzhenitsyn quotes Lenin's telegram to Yevgeniya Bosh, president of the Penza Province Executive Committee, advising "lock up all the doubtful ones in a concentration camp outside the city." (Lenin, *Polnoye Sobraniye Sochineniy* [Collected works], 5th Russian ed., vol. 50, pp. 143–44). Other official documents may be cited to the same effect. Thus, a special resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) of September 5, 1918, says in part, "It is necessary to secure the Soviet Republic against its class enemies by isolating them in concentration camps" (*Yezhenedelnik ChK* [Weekly Bulletin of the Cheka], no. 1, September 22, 1918, p. 11). In February 1919 Grigory Sokolnikov, a member of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist party (Bolsheviks) and of the Military Revolutionary Council of the Southern Front, objecting to Central Committee directives on "de-Cossackization," the mass shooting of Cossacks who gave aid to Krasnov or served in the White Army,<sup>7</sup> proposed that instead of being shot

<sup>7</sup>Pyotr Nikolayevich Krasnov (1869–1947): General of the czarist army; tried to suppress the October 1917 revolution in Petrograd; led rebellion against Soviet rule in Don Cossack region in 1918–19; resigned and went into exile in Germany, many of his forces joining Gen. A. I. Denikin's White army.

they be employed in socially useful labor in the coal-mining districts, for building railroads and digging shale and peat. For this purpose Sokolnikov requested by telegram that "work begin immediately on the construction of facilities for concentration camps" (Central Party Archives, collection 17, shelf 4, file 53, sheet 54). The concentration camps of civil war times were quite primitive structures, and the regimen enforced in them bore very little resemblance to that of the camps of the 1930s. Sometimes the people in them were put to work. In other cases, in districts near the battle fronts, an area outside a city would simply be fenced off, the "socially dangerous elements" would be detained there but would not work, and their relatives and friends would bring them food and hand it to them through the fences. Toward the end of 1920 most of those confined in concentration camps were peasants arrested for "speculation," as can be seen from documents of the Cheka. With the end of the civil war many of these camps were dismantled and their inmates sent home. At the beginning of NEP,<sup>8</sup> the camps for political prisoners were apparently abolished nearly everywhere, with the exception of the Solovetsky Special Purpose Camp and several "political isolators"<sup>9</sup>—of which Solzhenitsyn writes.

Space does not allow us to explore here the question of which elements in the early history of these political camps were dictated by the stern necessities of those years and which constituted plainly excessive and unnecessary cruelty. But it would be wrong to place the camps of the civil war period and those of Stalin's time on the same plane and ignore the fact that in 1918–20 the Soviet Republic was fighting a war on several fronts against foreign-backed White governments and that the

numerous concentration camps set up on territory held by the White armies and foreign interventionist forces were usually far more savage than those in the RSFSR. In Stalin's time, on the other hand, the terror of the camps was directed against people who were unarmed and defenseless, and were not hostile toward the sole existing, and firmly established, power in the land. For Solzhenitsyn this distinction seems not to exist.

### The 1937 Wave

SOLZHENITSYN does not hide his distaste for the government, party, and economic leaders, top commanders of the Red Army, leading cadres of the Young Communist League and the trade unions, and especially the high-ranking personnel of the NKVD and the Prosecutor General's Office,<sup>10</sup> who themselves became the object of brutal repression in 1937 and '38. Even in the first volume of *Gulag Archipelago* Solzhenitsyn wrote:

If you study in detail the whole history of the arrests and trials of 1936 to 1938, the principal revulsion you feel is not against Stalin and his accomplices, but against the humiliatingly repulsive defendants—nausea at their spiritual baseness after their former pride and implacability.

All these people, during the civil war or during collectivization and industrialization, so Solzhenitsyn asserts, were pitiless toward their political opponents and therefore deserved no pity when their own "system" turned against them.

In the second volume, we find the same attitude on the author's part toward the "1937 wave." With obvious satisfaction Solzhenitsyn cites the names of dozens of major Communist party figures shot on Stalin's orders in 1937–38. These people deserved their fate, he suggests; they got what they had made ready for, or given to, others.

<sup>8</sup>NEP: The New Economic Policy, introduced in 1921, under which peasants were allowed to trade on the market and were taxed a certain amount of grain or other produce instead of having it requisitioned by the state. Grain requisitioning had been the policy under "war communism" during the 1918–20 civil war. The NEP ended with the beginning of forced collectivization and industrialization in 1929–30.

<sup>9</sup>"Political isolators": Separate Soviet prisons for holding political oppositionists of the non-Communist left or dissident Communists.

<sup>10</sup>NKVD: Narodnyi Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del, or People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, official name of the Soviet state-security organization (1934–46), made especially notorious by its role in the Great Purge of 1936–38.

And though [he writes], when the young Tukhachevsky returned victoriously from suppressing the devastated Tambov peasants, there was no Mariya Spiridonova waiting at the station to put a bullet through his head, it was done sixteen years later by the Georgian priest who never graduated.<sup>11</sup>

But we can in no way share these sentiments and opinions of Solzhenitsyn's.

First, one cannot ignore the fact that the leaders who perished in the 1930s were not all the same kind of people, either in their personal characters or in the degree of responsibility they had for the crimes of the preceding years. There were people who had already degenerated greatly, who had been so caught up in Stalin's system that they carried out the most savage and inhuman orders without thinking of the country or the people, but only of themselves and their power. These people not only carried out orders but "demonstrated initiative" on their own, helping Stalin and the NKVD organs to "expose" and annihilate "enemies of the people." But there were quite a few who acted in error, who were simultaneously victims and instruments of another cult—the cult of party discipline. Among them were many honest, self-sacrificing, and courageous people who, too late, came to understand a great deal. There were quite a few who thought about what was happening in the country and were tormented by it, but who believed in the party and the party's propaganda. It

would seem, from today's vantage point, that we could speak of the historical and political guilt of the entire active party membership for the events of the 1920s and 1930s. But we cannot simply lump all these people together indiscriminately as criminals who got what they deserved. The fate of the majority of the revolutionary Bolsheviks remains one of the most awesome tragedies in the history of our country, and we cannot in any way condone Solzhenitsyn in his mocking suggestion that in the obituaries published in our country the words "perished tragically during the period of the cult" should be replaced by the words "perished comically." The best Russian writers never indulged in mockery of the dead. Let us recall Pushkin, who wrote these lines:

Riego did transgress against Spain's king.  
There I agree. But for that he was hanged.  
Is it seemly, tell me now, for us  
To hotly curse the hangman's fallen victim?<sup>12</sup>

Earlier, in reading the first volume of *Gulag Archipelago*, I was unpleasantly surprised by Solzhenitsyn's words that he had somehow been "consoled"—when describing the trials at which People's Commissar of Justice Krylenko appeared as the accuser—"consoled" by the thought of the degradation to which Krylenko was reduced in Butyrka prison before he was shot, the same Krylenko who had condemned others to similar degradation.<sup>13</sup> It

<sup>11</sup>*Tukhachevsky, Tambov, Spiridonova*: Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky (1893–1937), one of the group of top Red Army leaders shot on Stalin's orders in the 1937 purge. Came to prominence as a Red general in the civil war. Active in the suppression of an anti-Bolshevik peasant rebellion in Tambov province in 1921–22, which was led by members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRs): Tambov province, in the Volga region of European Russia, was the center of SR influence from before the 1905–06 revolution. During that revolution the SR terrorist Mariya Aleksandrovna Spiridonova (1884–1941) shot the czarist official in charge of suppressing a Tambov peasant rebellion. Spiridonova was sent to hard labor for many years. In 1917 she emerged as a leader of the Left SR party, which joined the Bolsheviks in the first Soviet government but began to oppose them in 1918, led a number of revolts and assassinated Bolshevik leaders. Spiridonova was arrested in late 1918, imprisoned for a time, and after being amnestied, quit politics. Arrested by the NKVD in 1937, she died in the camps.

<sup>12</sup>*Pushkin; Riego*: Aleksandr S. Pushkin (1799–1937), Russia's foremost classical poet. These four lines are from his 1825 poem "Na Vorontsova," written in response to a remark made by Count Vorontsov, a courtier of the czar.

Colonel Rafael del Riego y Nuñez (1785–1823) was the leader of a constitutionalist rebellion in 1820 against Ferdinand VI, king of Spain. Czar Alexander I urged the Holy Alliance to intervene in Ferdinand's behalf, and in November 1823 troops of the Holy Alliance defeated Riego's forces, and Riego was captured and executed. When word of this reached Czar Alexander's court, Count Vorontsov was heard to remark, "What happy news, Your Majesty; one scoundrel less in the world."

<sup>13</sup>*Krylenko; Butyrka*: Nikolai Vasilyevich Krylenko (1885–1938), active Bolshevik from 1904. First people's commissar of war in 1917–18; chief state prosecutor for important political trials, 1918–31. Made commissar of justice of the Russian Republic in 1931, and of the U.S.S.R. in 1936. Arrested in 1937 and shot without trial. Butyrka—an old prison in Moscow that held political prisoners under the czars (built under Catherine the Great in

seems to me that the author's attitude here is quite far removed from the simple standard of human decency, not to mention the Christian virtues of "understanding mildness" and "uncategorical judgments," which Solzhenitsyn proclaims at the end of the second volume.

Solzhenitsyn's position seems wrong to us not only because the government and party leaders destroyed were most often replaced by people who, it is common knowledge, were even worse. Thus, in Yezhov's and Beria's times one could with reason regret the passing of such Chekists as Latsis and Peters. The brutality of Latsis and Peters,<sup>14</sup> sometimes justified and sometimes not, was at any rate never self-seeking, sadistic, or aimed at currying favor. Those men apparently could not have gone down the road of crime as far as Yezhov, Beria, Zakovsky,<sup>15</sup> and their kind.

It must be said, simply, that no one deserved the dreadful fate that befell the leaders arrested in 1937–38. It is impossible to take satisfaction in the thought of their degradation and torment, even knowing that many of them deserved death.

One of Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories* tells the fate of a deputy head of the Leningrad NKVD, Nikonov, an accomplice of Yezhov

and Zakovsky, who during "interrogation" had his testicles crushed.<sup>16</sup> Solzhenitsyn himself in the first volume wrote about this method of torture as the worst kind, one that cannot be endured. In reading Shalamov's story I did not feel any gratification. It is quite likely that this Nikonov fully deserved to be tried and shot for his crimes. But even he did not deserve such cruel torture and abuse. It is a profoundly mistaken notion of morality to think that Stalin's reprisals against the main cadres of the Communist party and Soviet government represented, even in an extremely distorted form, the triumph of some sort of historical justice. No, the death of these people was the prologue to a reign of injustice still more terrible, affecting not only the party but our entire people.

Solzhenitsyn is prepared, oddly enough, to regard the entire Soviet people, Russians and non-Russians alike, as having deserved the unhappy fate they suffered in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Even in the first volume, having in mind not just the party but the most ordinary people of our land, he exclaimed: "We spent ourselves in one unrestrained outburst in 1917, and then we *hurried* to submit. We submitted *with pleasure!* ... We purely and simply

the 18th century). Under Stalin it was one of three main prisons where "politicals" were held for interrogation and sentencing.

<sup>14</sup>*Latsis and Peters*: Prominent Cheka officials of the civil war period, both Latvians. Martyn Ivanovich Latsis (1888–1938 or 1941, real name Yan Fridrikhovich Sudrabs), transferred to economic work in 1921; arrested in the Great Purge. Yakov Khristoforovich Peters (1886–1938), deputy chief of GPU, 1925–30.

<sup>15</sup>*Yezhov, Beria, Zakovsky*: Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov (1895–1939 or 1940), minor party official promoted by Stalin in early 1930s; made people's commissar of internal affairs in September 1936, to preside over the Great Purge of 1936–38, which is often called the *Yezhovshchina* ("the time of Yezhov") because of his role. Replaced by Beria in December 1938; arrested and shot.

Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria, (1899–1953); chief of state security in Transcaucasia, 1921–31; head of Transcaucasian party organization after that. Replaced Yezhov as commissar of internal affairs; remained chief of Soviet security until his execution shortly after Stalin's death.

Leonid M. Zakovsky: A deputy commissar of the NKVD, 1934–38; supervised Leningrad and Moscow purges in 1937–38; liquidated soon after Beria replaced Yezhov as head of NKVD.

<sup>16</sup>*Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov* (born 1907): Soviet writer; survivor of 17 years in the Kolyma camp complex in the Soviet Far East. His *Kolyma Stories* circulate in manuscript in the U.S.S.R.; published in a French edition: *Récits de Kolyma* (Paris, 1969). One of these stories, "Lend-Lease Comes to a Soviet Camp," appeared in the Summer 1974 *Dissent*.

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deserved everything that happened afterward” (Solzhenitsyn’s emphasis). Many similar pronouncements can be found in the second volume as well. The error and injustice of this view seems too obvious to spend any time refuting it.

## The Communist Captives of Gulag

APPARENTLY the majority of those shot in 1937–38 were Communists. In addition, however, hundreds of thousands of rank-and-file members and middle-level cadres of the party and youth organizations were arrested and sent to the camps along with other prisoners. Solzhenitsyn devotes one of the chapters of his second volume to their fate and discusses the Communists at some length in other chapters of this volume. Touching very briefly on those for whom “Communist convictions were inward and not constantly on the tips of their tongues,” who did not make a great show of their “party attitude” and did not separate themselves from the other prisoners, Solzhenitsyn directs his attention mainly to those “orthodox Communists” and “loyalists” (the chapter on the Communists is entitled “The Loyalists”) who sought to justify Stalin and his terror while they were in the camps, who would sing the [party-song] lines “I know no other country/ Where a person breathes so freely” while en route in prisoner transports, and who considered virtually every other zek to have been justly condemned and only themselves to be suffering by accident. Solzhenitsyn finds a number of occasions for making fun of such “loyalists” and “orthodox Communists.” Sometimes his irony is fully deserved. It is true that among the Communists arrested in 1937–38 there were quite a few who continued to believe not only in Stalin but even in Yezhov, and who held themselves aloof from, or were even hostile toward, the other prisoners. But insight came rather quickly, although for understandable reasons it was not always complete, and after several months of “interrogation” the number of the “loyalists” and “orthodox” among arrested party

members fell off rapidly. And there were very few of them in the camps. For the majority of Communists, however, condemnation of Stalin and the NKVD organs did not mean the repudiation of socialist and communist convictions.

Solzhenitsyn plainly sins against the truth when, in describing the fate of the Communists in the camps, he declares that they never objected to “the dominance of the thieves in the kitchens and among the trusties” and that “all the orthodox Communists ... soon [got] themselves well fixed up.” The author of *Gulag Archipelago* even raises the following hypothesis: “Yes, and were there not perhaps some written or at least oral directives: to make things easier for the Communists?”

No, Aleksandr Isayevich, no such directives ever existed, and you knew it well when, in your novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, you told of the fate of the Communist Buinovskiy, thrown into the cold punishment block for no reason.<sup>17</sup> From the fate enjoyed in the camps by Boris Dyakov and Galina Serebryakova,<sup>18</sup> you cannot draw conclusions about the position and conduct of the bulk of the Communists who found themselves in Stalin’s camps. In many respects their circumstances were even worse than those of prisoners in other categories and quite a few of them died in the camps—in fact it is likely they died in greater numbers than other prisoners. On this point there are of course no reli-

<sup>17</sup>Buinovskiy: In Solzhenitsyn’s story, the idealistic and defiant ex-naval commander, sent to the camps as a “spy” because an Allied officer he had met during wartime service had mailed him a gift. (Modeled after Boris Burkovskiy, a fellow inmate of the author’s.)

<sup>18</sup>Boris Dyakov (born 1902) and Galina Serebryakova (born 1905): Both are Soviet writers and former camp inmates (Solzhenitsyn dismisses them as trusties). In the post-Stalin era both became prominent on the conservative side in Soviet literary disputes. Dyakov, author of standard socialist-realist production novels, wrote memoirs of the camps that were published in a Soviet magazine in early 1963 and reissued as a book in 1966. These *Memoirs of Survival* (*Povest o perezhitom*) were praised by conservatives, who counterposed them to Solzhenitsyn’s *Ivan Denisovich* because Dyakov stressed faith in the party despite the cruelties in the camps. Serebryakova’s memoirs, entitled *Sandstorm*, were published in a Soviet newspaper in 1964, but did not come out in book form in the U.S.S.R.

able statistics. However, we know from the materials of party conferences, held after the 22d Soviet Communist Party Congress,<sup>19</sup> that of the party members arrested in Moscow in 1936–39 only about 6 percent returned there in 1955–57. The remaining 94 percent were rehabilitated *posthumously*. And throughout the U.S.S.R., out of a million party members arrested in the latter half of the 1930s, not more than 60–80,000 returned after 15 to 18 years imprisonment. The suffering they endured left a deep mark on these people, and very few were left among them who in any way resembled those Solzhenitsyn now writes of with such sarcasm.

### Socialism, Revolution, or Religion?

IN PART FOUR of this book, on “The Soul and Barbed Wire,” Solzhenitsyn specifically discusses his spiritual rebirth in the camps, his return to the belief in God instilled in him as an adolescent but abandoned by him as a young man in favor of Marxism. Although with reservations, the author, surprisingly enough, even expresses gratitude for the experience of the camps, for it was precisely the suffering he underwent in them that helped him return to the fold of Christianity. “*Bless you, prison!*” the author writes in emphatic type at the close of his chapter “The Ascent.”

In this part of his book Solzhenitsyn expresses some profound though very bitter thoughts. But much of what is written here strikes a false note (at least to my ears). All these extremely impassioned outcries against Marxism, “the infallible and intolerant doctrine,” which demands only results, only matter and not *spirit*, all these arguments about how only faith in

God saved and elevated the human spirit in the camps, while faith in the future triumph of social justice, in a better way of organizing society, failed to prevent spiritual corruption and virtually led one straight into the ranks of stool pigeons—all this has an unproved and arbitrary sound. A regrettable state of embitterment leads the author to that very “intolerance and infallibility” of judgment of which he accuses Marxism.

Solzhenitsyn does not even consider it possible for nonreligious people to distinguish between good and bad.

Equating socialism with Stalinism, he naturally cannot understand that there are people for whom the tragedy they or their countrymen experienced can only become a further incentive to struggle for social justice and for a better life for humanity on this earth, for the elimination of all forms of oppression of one person by another, including pseudosocialist forms of such oppression. Solzhenitsyn does not understand that socialist convictions can be the basis for a genuinely humanist set of values and a profoundly humane morality. And if up to now the problems of ethics and morals have not yet found satisfactory treatment in Marxist-Leninist theory, this by no means implies that scientific socialism is incapable by its very nature of establishing moral values.

Summing up the thinking he did in camp, Solzhenitsyn writes:

Since then I have come to understand the truth of all the religions of the world: They struggle with the *evil inside a human being* (inside every human being). It is impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to constrict it within each person.

And since that time I have come to understand the falsehood of all the revolutions in history: They destroy only *those carriers* of evil contemporary with them (and also fail, out of haste, to discriminate the carriers of good as well). And they then take to themselves as their heritage the actual evil itself, magnified still more.

This juxtaposition seems to me neither accurate nor just. For it is necessary to fight against evil not only within each person, but also against the carriers of evil contemporary

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<sup>19</sup>The 22d Congress of the Communist party of the U.S.S.R., held Oct. 17–31, 1961, publicly revived and extended the de-Stalinization campaign that had subsided a year or so after Krushchev's secret speech at the 1956 20th Congress. The 22d Congress set off a new series of official investigations and revelations about the Stalin era that were only brought to a halt in the latter half of the 1960s, under Brezhnev and Kosygin. A notable event during the 22d Congress was the removal of Stalin's remains from the Lenin mausoleum.



with us, and against unjust social institutions. This struggle goes on in various forms. Well and good if it takes the form of peaceful competition between ideologies and is realized through reforms and gradual changes for the better. But there still will be times when revolutionary forms of struggle must be resorted to, and although these may be accompanied by many sacrifices and disappointments, they by no means necessarily lead to the magnification of evil in the world. It is not socialist doctrine alone that can be distorted and turned against individuals and against all of humanity; so can the tenets of any religion. History offers more than a few examples of this, including the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has its own peculiar traditions of obscurantism. It is well known that in the 16th

century the Russian Church was still burning heretics alive. Incidentally, one may find in Stalin's behavior and criminal actions not only the pragmatic attitude held by many revolutionaries toward violence and the use of extreme measures but also the dogmatism, casuistry, intolerance, and other qualities that are undoubtedly, to some extent, the result of his five years in an Orthodox school and three in an Orthodox seminary.

Terrible are the crimes Solzhenitsyn so vividly depicts in his book, and we are all as one with him in the condemnation of those crimes. But I continue to believe that only the victory of a genuinely socialist society, of genuinely socialist human and moral relations, can provide humanity with a firm guarantee that such crimes will never be repeated.

*Translated by* GEORGE SAUNDERS □

## Old Debates, Living Issues

It's hard to suppose that anyone who has lived through the experience of radical sectarianism would ever wish to go back to it, or would care to appraise it with anything but a complicated irony. Yet there are moments when it seems that some elements in that past had their value. Thus the distinguished Russian physicist Leonid Plyushch, speaking after his release from a Soviet mental hospital and discussing the role of the Russian oppositionists, said last February that in his *samizdat* writings

I proved that Stalinism is a Thermidorian Bonapartist degeneration of the October Revolution, that state capitalism had been built in the Soviet Union, property belongs to a state which is alienated from all classes, property does not belong to the people. The bureaucracy is the servant of the abstract capitalist—the state.  
[Quoted in the *New York Times*, February 4, 1976]

A few of our readers may remember left-wing discussions of several decades ago as to the "class nature" of Stalinism. Was the Russian dictatorship "bureaucratic collectivism" as some of us said, or "state capitalism," or was it still, as orthodox

Trotskyists said, "a degenerated workers state"? That there was no realistic sense in which the Russian party dictatorship could be called a "workers' state," any sensible person living in Russia must surely know—and Plyushch is clearly a man of sharp intelligence.

What is so interesting in his sociological characterizations is that, in his own way, he returns to the terms of debate that one could hear in the tiny world of the anti-Stalinist left several decades ago—terms of debate liberals unconcerned with theory, professors disdainful of left-wing categories, and other wise people looked down upon. Yet those debates, whatever their faults and excesses, really did touch on significant political issues, and it is of some political interest that the Russian dissidents, struggling to define the tyranny under which they suffer, should turn—on their own? through word of discussions in the West that has reached them?—to these terms and theories. It makes one feel a bit more hopeful about the possibility of connecting the thoughts of the past with the struggles of the future. □