

Two from Solzhenitsyn

These two letters by the Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn reveal vividly the condition of the writer in his struggle against the Communist bureaucracy of Russia. The first letter was written to a group of students who had visited him; the second was sent to the Writers' Union in protest against his expulsion. We reprint the translations from Survey, with thanks. While preparing to go to press, we learn that Solzhenitsyn has won the Nobel Prize.—ED.

I FEEL THAT I HAVE NOT TOLD you everything, that I have not fully clarified my thoughts. Here then are a few more words.

Justice has been the common patrimony of humanity throughout the ages. It does not cease to exist for the majority even when it is twisted in some (“exclusive”) circles. Obviously it is a concept which is inherent in man, since it cannot be traced to any other source. Justice exists even if there are only a few individuals who recognize it as such. The love of justice seems to me to be a different sentiment from the love of people (or at least the two coincide only partially). And in periods of mass decadence, when the question is posed, “Why bother? What are the sacrifices for?” it is possible to answer with certainty: “For justice.” There is nothing relative about justice, as there is nothing relative about conscience. Indeed, justice *is* conscience, not a personal conscience but the conscience of the whole of humanity. Those who clearly recognize the voice of their own conscience usually recognize also the voice of justice. I consider that in all social or historical questions (if we are aware of them, not from hearsay or books, but are touched by them spiritually), justice will always suggest a way to act (or judge) which will not conflict with our conscience.

As our intelligence is usually not sufficient to grasp, to understand, and to foresee the course of history (and, as you say, it has been demonstrated that to “plan” it is absurd) you will never err if you act in any social situation in accordance with justice (the old way of saying it in Russian is: to live by truth *). In this way you will always be able to act and not just be a passive witness.

And please do not tell me that “everybody understands justice in his own way.” No! They can shout, they can take you by the throat, they can tear your breast, but convictions based on conscience are as infallible as the internal rhythm of the heart (and one knows that in private life it is the voice of conscience we often try to suppress).

For example, I am sure that the best among the Arabs understand that—according to justice—Israel has a right to exist and to live. *Ryazan, October 1967*

IT IS SHAMEFUL that you trample your own statutes underfoot in this manner. You have expelled me in my absence, as if there were a fire, without even sending me a summons or a telegram, without even giving me the four hours necessary to come from Ryazan to be present at the meeting.

You have clearly demonstrated that the decision preceded the “investigation.”

* The words truth (*pravda*) and justice (*spravedlivost*) have the same root in Russian.

Was it easier for you to find new charges in my absence? Were you afraid of being obliged to grant me ten minutes to make my answer?

I am compelled therefore to send this letter in reply.

Blow the dust off the clock. Your watches are slow in relation to our times. Draw open the heavy curtains you treasure so much. You do not even suspect that it is daylight outside. It is no longer the time of the deaf, the somber period with no way out when it pleased you to expel Akhmatova. Nor is it any longer the period of timidity and frost when you expelled Pasternak, hurling abuse at him. Was this shame not enough for you?

Do you want to make it greater? But the hour is near when each one of you will try to efface the signature he put under the resolution taken today.

Blind leading the blind, you do not even notice that you are going in the opposite direction from the one you yourselves indicated. At this critical time, you are incapable of suggesting anything constructive, anything good for our society which is gravely ill; you have only your hatred, your vigilance, your "let's hold on and not let go."

Your lumbering statements fall flat; your stupidity stirs feebly; you have no arguments. There is only the unanimous vote and the administrative repression. And this is why neither Sholokhov nor any of you dared to reply to the letter of Lydia Chukovskaya who is the pride of Russian committed literature. But the administrative pincers will close in on her. How can one dare read a book which has not been published? Once the authorities decide not to publish you, stifle yourself, cease to exist, refuse to allow anyone to read what you have written.

They are also considering the expulsion of Lev Kopelev, the front-line veteran, who has already served ten years in a camp, although he was completely innocent. But today he is guilty. Why did he intervene on behalf of the persecuted? Why did he reveal the facts about his secret meetings with an influential person? But why, then, do you arrange such conversations which are kept secret from the people? Were we not promised 50 years ago that never again would there be any secret diplomacy, secret meetings, secret and incomprehensible appointments and dismissals, and that the masses would discuss everything out in the open?

"The enemy will overhear"—that is your excuse. The "enemies," eternal and ever present, provide an easy justification for your functions and for your very existence. But what would you do without enemies? You could not survive without enemies. Hatred, hatred as evil as racial hatred, has become your sterile atmosphere. Thus it is that one loses sight of common humanity and moves to perdition. Should the Antarctic ice melt tomorrow, all mankind would drown, and into whose heads would you then be drilling your concepts of "class struggle"?

And I am not even talking about what would happen when the few surviving bipeds wander across a radioactive earth to die. It is high time to remember that we belong first and foremost to humanity, that man has distinguished himself from animals by thought and language. Men naturally should be free, and if they are put in chains, we will return to the animal stage.

Public recognition of facts, complete and honest, that is the first condition of health in all societies, including our own. He who refuses this, cares nothing for the fatherland and thinks only of his own interest. He who refuses this for the fatherland, cannot cure our illnesses but only repress them and induce putrefaction.

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