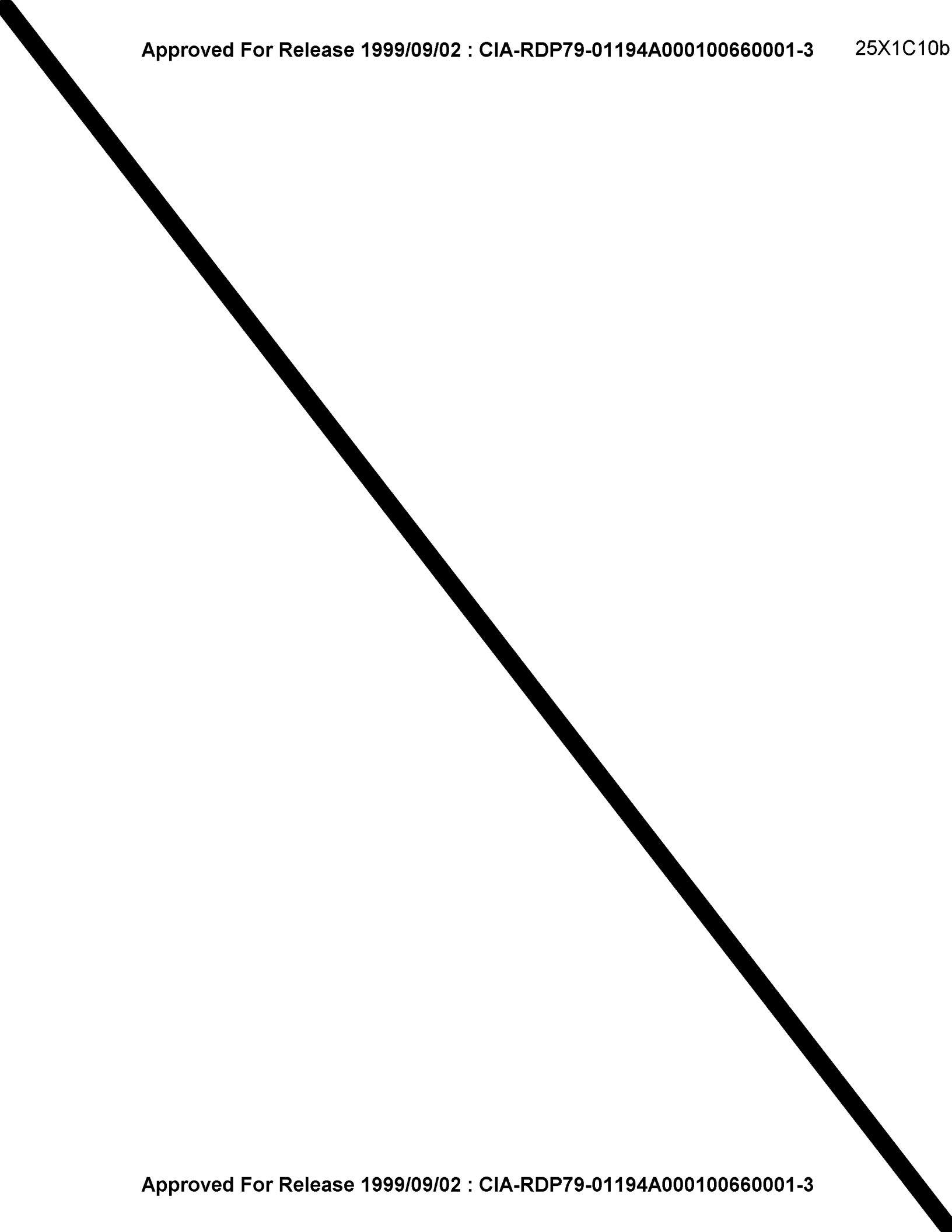

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Between Issues

WE GO about planning our semiannual book issues in fairly standard fashion—checking the publishers' catalogues and *Publishers Weekly* for books about to come out that seem worthy of particular attention; trying to match up the best possible reviewers; striving (generally in vain) to achieve some kind of balance between fiction and nonfiction. Our initial list of potential candidates for inclusion each time around runs to 150 titles, of which we actually arrange to have roughly 25 reviewed. In the end, space limitations usually prevent us from taking up more than 15-20 books, and most often these include one or two we could not know about when the planning began. So the whole process involves less personal preference or plotting or even predictability than some want to believe. And frequently, as we are about to put such a book number to bed, we ourselves are struck by some aspects of its contents.

We had no inkling until the man in the White House took to the tube last April 29, for example, that the runaway bestseller of 1974 would be making its initial appearance the next day under the unlikely imprimatur of the Government Printing Office, with the hardly catchy title, *Submission of Recorded Presidential Conversations to the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives by President Richard Nixon.* The unexpected event prompted a phone call to a veteran NL contributor who is widely regarded as one of the most knowledgeable Watergate specialists in the Washington press corps, Daniel Schorr of CBS News. Hence the singular analysis of the White House transcripts leading off our regular reviews.

Less surprising perhaps, but nevertheless interesting to us, is the fact that five of the writers whose works are discussed in this survey of major spring publications have been among our contributors over the years: James Baldwin and Albert Murray, the subjects of Pearl K. Bell's unflinching opening essay, virtually began their writing careers here; ditto Diane Ravitch, a former staff member now specializing in education who is the author of *The Great School Wars: New York City 1805-1973*; while Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose eloquent *Letter to the Soviet Leaders* receives the careful scrutiny it deserves in Abraham Brumberg's essay, was first published in this country in these pages; and most recently Stanley Hoffmann, whose new book is *Decline or Renewal? France Since the 1930s*, wrote our cover article, "The Incompatible Allies" (NL, April 1).

We could go on citing other curiosities, but you will surely note them yourself. More important, we trust you will find what follows engaging in every sense of that word.

OUR COVER is by our art director, Herb Lubalin.

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UNDERSTANDING SOLZHENITSYN

BY ABRAHAM BRUMBERG

WHEN EXCERPTS from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's 15,000-word *Letter to the Soviet Leaders* first appeared in the Western press, it looked—least to those who had not followed his work, fiction and nonfiction—as though the Nobel laureate had finally decided to shed the writer's mantle for that of the prophet. And in the process he, like so many of his predecessors, seemed to be embracing sundry obscurantist Slavophile attitudes, including contempt for the "decadent West," an admiration for the pristine virtues of pre-Peter-the-Great Russia, and an ardent belief in the superiority of the Russian Orthodox Church.

With their penchant for iconoclasm, American newsmen quickly seized upon the *Letter* as evidence that Solzhenitsyn is an "isolationist" (New York *Times*), a "utopian conservative" (*Time*) and a "disbeliever in democracy" (*Newsweek*). But the most strident reaction of all came from *Times* columnist William Safire. In a piece distinguished as much by vulgarity as by ignorance, the former White House savant admonished the Russian author for "disappoint[ing] the people over here who are grabbing up your books like *blinis*," and informed him that "we need a Tolstoy, not a Rasputin."

Now, it is true that Solzhenitsyn's *Letter* contains views and sentiments with which many of his admirers, East and West, are bound to disagree. Soviet civil rights activist Andrei Sakharov, for instance, has issued a critical response. But disagreements are one thing, and primitive condemnations (or facile comparisons) another. Even Sakharov, whose general philosophical approach is profoundly at odds with that of his compatriot, may yet come to revise some of his opinions, based as they are on easily misleading "excerpts broadcast over Western radio stations." In addition, the excerpts he heard may have been those the New York *Times* unfortunately saw fit to print and comment upon the very day that the full text, extensively revised by Solzhenitsyn himself, appeared in the London *Sunday Times*.

The final version (copublished here this month by the Index on Censorship and Harper & Row, 59 pp., $3.95), though in many respects curious and disturbing, is immensely powerful and entirely consistent with the author's previous writings. Indeed, for all its faults (which, Solzhenitsyn notes in his introduction, he is ready to correct if confronted with "cogent and constructive criticism"), it may ultimately be regarded as one of the most important documents to come

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from the pen of a contemporary Russian writer.

The *Letter* was written and dispatched last September, in the hope of eliciting some sort of response from the Soviet leaders. Lest Solzhenitsyn be suspected of a touch of megalomania, it should perhaps be recalled that many other prominent dissidents have adopted the same procedure: All three of Sakharov's famous memoranda, for example, were also addressed to the Party leaders, presumably with similar expectations.

In any event, it is hardly surprising that Leonid Brezhnev and Company took no public notice, for the *Letter* is above all an acrid attack on Marxism-Leninism, the ideology Solzhenitsyn holds responsible for all the ills of Soviet society, from agricultural stagnation to the arbitrary terror of Stalin and the judicial repressions of his successors. Wholly convinced the USSR faces the threat of a major war with China, he ascribes even that to ideological causes: "Sixty million of our fellow countrymen may be killed . . . because the sacred truth is written on page 533 of Lenin and not on page 335."

In the long run, whether or not Solzhenitsyn believes that the Soviet leaders are reluctant "to change even a single syllable of what Marx said" is as irrelevant as whether their "adherence to the precepts of Marxism-Leninism" is a matter of mindless rigidity or political expediency (as Sakharov obviously believes). To the best of my knowledge, nobody in the West has fully explained the relationship between Marxism-Leninism as a "guide to action" and as a tool, and if Solzhenitsyn fails to give us an adequate explanation, he does no worse than hundreds of Western Sovietologists.

The important fact is that ideology permeates all facets of Soviet life, that it is employed as a justification for every policy, foreign or domestic, and that Solzhenitsyn gives us a devastatingly brilliant and incisive picture of how this works in practice. While his pleas to "throw away the dead ideology" and let the Chinese "glory in it for awhile" are certainly naïve, his description of the use of doctrine to justify political repression, economic inefficiency and social inequality is superb. Many have written about Soviet ideology as a system of lies, but few with such verve, passion and wit:

"How else can something dead pretend that it is living except by erecting a scaffolding of lies? Everything is steeped in lies and *everybody knows it*—and says so openly in private conversation, and jokes and moans about it, but in their official speeches they go on hypocritically parroting what they are 'supposed to say,' and with equal hypocrisy and boredom read and listen to the speeches of others: how much of society's energy is squandered on this!"

SOLZHENITSYN, then, is not a political thinker, but a chronicler; not a political analyst, but a critic—if you will, a poet. These deficiencies and qualities, as well as their inherent contradictions, emerge most forcefully in the passages where the author gives vent to his nostalgia for the past, his idealization of simple *Russian* virtues, and his spirited rejection of Western values—especially the belief in industrial and technological progress. Understandably, many Western observers have taken him to task for advocating such "retrogressive" notions.

In pleading with the Soviet leaders to reject unbridled technological growth as "not only unnecessary but ruinous," and placing the blame for it (along with Marxism, that "dark un-Russian whirlwind") at Western doors, Solzhenitsyn certainly follows in the footsteps of the early 19th-century Slavophiles. Not unlike them, he also seems to think that Russia's troubles began when Peter the Great abandoned the ancient capital of Moscow and hordes of Protestant and Catholic workers descended on the country to help build its new capital.

Yet stripped of their apocalyptic overtones and read simply as social criticism, Solzhenitsyn's angry words make sense: "We have squandered our resources foolishly . . . sapped our soil, mutilated our vast expanse with idiotic 'mainland seas' and contaminated belts of wasteland around our industrial centers." Likewise, his poignant evocation of the beauty and serenity of Russia's "old towns before they were invaded by multistory blocks" and "poisonous internal-combustion engines" is surely no less applicable to our country than to his. As he himself notes in acknowledging that "progressive Western scholars" are in large measure the source of his ecological observations: "It is not 'convergence' that faces us and the Western world now, but total renewal and reconstruction in both East and West, for both are in the same impasse."

If Solzhenitsyn's practical suggestions are often oddly and hopelessly impractical, they nevertheless adumbrate a vision of an ideal future bound to appeal to millions of his countrymen whose lives have been ravaged by the regime's relentless "*Drang nach Westen*." So will his plea to concentrate on developing the USSR's vast northeastern expanses, to which he devotes a good portion of his *Letter*.

Solzhenitsyn's call for an end to meddling in other countries' affairs, though rather jauntily phrased, will also surely find an echo among millions of Soviet citizens who view their government's economic (and political) aid to underdeveloped nations as unconscionable hypocrisy and a squandering of resources that could be put to much better use: "Let's leave the Arabs to their fate, they have Islam, they'll sort themselves out. And let's leave Africa to find out for itself how to start on

an independent road to statehood and civilization, and simply wish it the good fortune not to repeat the mistakes of 'uninterrupted progress.'" And his proposal to grant independence to the non-Russian nationalities that comprise nearly half of the Soviet population will strike a responsive chord, too. There can be no question, he says firmly, "of any peripheral nation being forcibly kept within the bounds of our country."

All these notions might conceivably be classified as "Slavophile." But they have nothing in common with the xenophobia, anti-Semitism and philistine provincialism that characterize the thinking of many Soviet patriots today—both those who advocate their ideas openly in the pages of Party journals (with the watchful connivance of the authorities) and those who contribute to *samizdat*.

Open modern Slavophilism has found its home in organizations like the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Historical Monuments, officially inaugurated in June 1966, and in journals such as *Molodaya Gvardiya* (Young Guard), the monthly organ of the Komsomol (Young Communist League), which frequently express ill-disguised chauvinistic and anti-Semitic views. The *samizdat* publication *Veche* (the word for town-assemblies in medieval Russia), edited by V. Osipov, a one-time Marxist turned patriot, pretends to espouse the position of the early liberal Slavophiles, but frequently runs articles more reminiscent of the views of the Tsarist Black Hundreds. Thus issue No. 3, 1971, carries a letter—signed by Petukhov, a Moscow priest; Varsonofii Khaibulin, a student of the Moscow Theological Academy; and one Fomin, a "senior research fellow"—placing the blame for the ills that have befallen Russia (including secularization and the persecution of Russian Orthodoxy) on "world Zionism-Satanism."

WHAT OF Solzhenitsyn's disdain for Western parliamentary democracy, and his belief that the Party should remain in power if it allows free reign to "art and literature" and to "philosophical, ethical, economic and social studies"? Again, the parallels between his proposals and those of some 19th-century Slavophiles are unquestionably striking. ("What the Russian people want," wrote one of their principal representatives, Konstantin Aksakov, "is not political freedom but freedom of the spirit.") Nowhere does Solzhenitsyn betray the effects of his isolation from the outside world more than in his excoriation of "'democracy run riot' . . . every four years the politicians, and indeed the entire country, nearly kill themselves over an electoral campaign, trying to gratify the masses"

Solzhenitsyn's hostility to the West derives as much from a reaction to the rampant cynicism and hypocrisy that he perceives in contemporary Western societies as from the traditional Slavophile abhorrence of Western civilization. Essentially a moralist, he is equally revolted by the systematic violence of the Soviet regime and by the acquiescence to it on the part of individuals and governments in the West. His credo, affirmed in his Nobel Lecture, is disarmingly simple: "All internal affairs have ceased to exist on our crowded Earth. The salvation of mankind lies only in making everything the concern of all. People in the East should without exception be concerned about what people are thinking in the West; people in the West should without exception care about what is happening in the East."

A careful reading of Solzhenitsyn's *Letter*, moreover, makes it clear that he is not in principle opposed to democracy. "You are realists *par excellence*," he says to the Soviet leaders, "and you will not allow power to slip out of your hands. That is why you will not willingly tolerate *real* elections, at which people might not vote you in." He comes to the "melancholy" conclusion that "the sudden reintroduction" of a multiparty parliamentary system in the USSR might not work at this time, and goes on to say: "So should we not perhaps acknowledge that . . . *for the foreseeable future, whether we like it or not, whether we intend it or not*, Russia is nevertheless destined to have an authoritarian order." (Italics mine.—A.B.) But this hardly makes him a determined foe of democracy or a dogmatic authoritarian, as some have alleged.

AS FOR Solzhenitsyn's commitment to religion, on the one hand, he pleads for "a competition . . . not for power but for truth—between all ideological and moral currents, in particular between *all religions*," adding parenthetically: "I myself see Christianity today as the only living spiritual force capable of undertaking the spiritual healing of Russia. But I request and propose no special privileges for it, simply that it should be treated fairly and not suppressed." On the other hand, he extols "Christian Orthodoxy, the ancient, seven-centuries-old Orthodoxy . . . before it was battered by Patriarch Nikon and bureaucratized by Peter the Great."

In view of the character of the Orthodox Church in Russia ever since its establishment in the 10th century—bigoted, authoritarian, and whenever possible a firm ally of the State, rather than an adversary—these words are, to say the least, discomfiting. Solzhenitsyn's understanding of this history is called into question by his contempt for the two men (however disparate) who attempted to reform the Church: the 17th-century Patriarch Nikon, who struck fear in the hearts of the faithful by bringing some of the rituals more into line with the prac-

tices of the rest of the Eastern Church; and Peter the Great, whose pro-Western proclivities outraged his benighted followers by flouting their conviction that Russian Orthodoxy alone was the true Orthodoxy.

Still, it would be wrong, not to say offensive, to assume that a belief in Russian Orthodoxy is in itself tantamount to embracing obscurantism and intolerance. The doctrines of Eastern Orthodoxy, if not the institution, have over the past century or so inspired some of the most outstanding figures in Russian history, including the early Slavophiles—who thought the Orthodox faith had the potential to unite a divided society—and such diverse thinkers as Nikolai Berdyaev, Lev I. Shestov or, for that matter, Leo Tolstoy.

Obviously, Solzhenitsyn's belief in the purifying mission of the Orthodox faith is more in keeping with early Slavophile notions than with the thinking of representatives or apologists of a servile and authoritarian Church. His 1969 story "The Easter Procession," describing the desecration of an Easter celebration in a Russian village, gave us an insight into the depth of his religious convictions. And his March 1972 "Lenten Letter" to the Patriarch of All Russia revealed his hostility to a Church that cooperates with state authorities openly committed to the eradication of religion. His devoutness, then, is a peculiar mixture of contradictory and perhaps even conflicting emotions, but this does not justify wholesale condemnation or derogatory epithets.

In sum, Solzhenitsyn's *Letter* is not of the same order as most of his fictional writings or the remarkable *Gulag Archipelago*. It is a profoundly *Russian* work—extreme, passionate, at times mystical, and frequently at odds with itself. It belongs in the mainstream of Slavophile writings, in that it seeks to find Russia's salvation in the country's unique historical and religious traditions. It sets Solzhenitsyn apart from many other Soviet dissenters, particularly Sakharov, who strongly advocates Western concepts of political freedom and democracy.

Sakharov's pained reaction to some of the ideas expressed in the *Letter* has revived the century-old debate between the "Westerners" and the Slavophiles among Russian intellectuals, in itself a fascinating phenomenon. Yet just as not all "Westerners" were radicals (Alexander Herzen, the most Western-minded of all the 19th-century Russian writers, was revolted by many of Western Europe's democratic institutions), so not all early Slavophiles (who bitterly opposed the repressive Tsarist regime) were "reactionaries."

Neither is a man so deeply committed to spiritual and intellectual freedom as Solzhenitsyn. In assessing the importance of the *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*, one must take into account not only the author's lack of realism but his humanity and uncompromising dedication to moral values. Above all, one must view the *Letter* against the background of Solzhenitsyn's long, courageous and often lonely struggle for decency and truth in a country that for more than half a century has known little of either.

Commentary

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The Real Solzhenitsyn

Jeri Laber

THE full text of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Open Letter to the Soviet Leaders* was first published on March 3 by the London *Times*, which described it as "a testament of astonishing power, with uncanny relevance to our own problems in the West." In its introduction the *Times* glossed over the authentically reactionary nature of Solzhenitsyn's political statements. Those who *have* remarked upon it have done so with surprise. Many Western admirers of his fight against despotism had considered Solzhenitsyn an advocate of liberal values and had, until the publication of the *Open Letter*, refused to acknowledge what should have been evident from a careful reading of his fiction and his earlier political pronouncements. Steeped in a mysticism distinctively Russian, shaped by circumstances peculiarly Soviet, Solzhenitsyn has evolved a unique, eccentric viewpoint. It is worth trying to understand, both for what it tells us about him and in order to revise certain faulty Western perceptions of recent Soviet events.

I

WHEN he was arrested in 1945 for criticizing Stalin in a letter from the front, Solzhenitsyn was twenty-seven years old, a gifted mathematician and a capable, respected artillery officer. He had yet to become aware of the full vindictiveness of Stalin's rule. If anything, his outlook and training, by his own admission, might very well have led him to become one of the executioners. Instead, he became a victim and was sent to prison. He emerged after eight years of forced labor, only to be engulfed by a new sentence: "exile for life" in a remote South Kazakhstan desert town. There he became seriously ill with cancer. Once again he confronted pain and the likelihood of death; once again he survived, quite miraculously cured. In 1956, three years after Stalin's death, he was "rehabilitated"; after eleven years, he was free.

At thirty-eight, Solzhenitsyn was an ex-prisoner, an outcast, alone. His mother had died during the war, and his wife had divorced him and remarried. He had no job to return to, nor had he even committed to paper the novels, plays, and poems he had composed and stored in his head during his years of imprisonment.

He had emerged from prison with two passions: an intense, mystical fixation upon Russia and her suffering people, and an abhorrence of Soviet Marxism. While in prison he had become a very religious man. He saw the ordeals that he had survived as trials devised by God to strengthen his moral character. His future fame, thus, was ordained; he had been "chosen" for a mission: to expose the terrors of Soviet violence. Years later, in his *Nobel Lecture on Literature*, he said:

> I have climbed my way to this lectern from which the Nobel Lecture is read . . . out of the dark and the cold where I WAS FATED TO SURVIVE and where others, who possessed perhaps greater talent and were stronger than I, perished.

Solzhenitsyn was in official favor for a short-lived period, coinciding more or less with the rise and fall of Nikita Khrushchev in the Kremlin. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, a fictionalized account of prison life and the book which brought Solzhenitsyn instant international fame, was published in 1962; aside from a few short stories, it is the only work of his that has been issued in the USSR. And by 1966 he had become a "nonperson." No reference was made to him in journals or the press, his name was excised from reference books and literary histories, and his few published writings vanished from bookstores and library shelves. He was to be ignored until he could be disposed of, quietly.

It was then that he began an active campaign to increase his public exposure, counting upon sympathetic world opinion to protect him from official wrath. The furthering of his cause thus gained added significance; it became, in itself, a means of self-preservation. His public statements were more frequent and more forceful, planned with military precision, timed to coincide with specific political events and introduced in ways that would insure the greatest amount of Western press coverage and publicity. A New York *Times* photographer for whom he posed described how Solzhenitsyn assumed a serious expression, "evidently thinking of his world image." For the first time he joined with others—men like Andrei Sakharov and Zhores Medvedev—in protesting the abuse of civil rights in the USSR.

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In all this, Solzhenitsyn was evidently preparing himself for martyrdom. As early as 1967 he declared that "no one can bar the road to truth, and to advance its cause I am prepared to accept even death." At a tempestuous writers' meeting in 1969 he read the same words again, underscoring what then began to seem like a self-fulfilling prophecy, and he repeated another of his statements, that he would "fulfill [his] duty as a writer . . . from the grave even more successfully and more irrefutably than in [his] lifetime." Last September he told Soviet leaders that he was "prepared to sacrifice [his] life."

Solzhenitsyn notified Western reporters that he might die mysteriously at the hands of the KGB. He advised them that he had sent unpublished works to the West with instructions to publish them should he die. The reference was to *Gulag Archipelago*, his exhaustive and momentous indictment of the Soviet prison-camp network. The recent publication of *Gulag* in the West was of course not triggered by Solzhenitsyn's death but by the suicide of a Leningrad woman who had turned a copy of the manuscript over to the KGB after five days of brutal questioning. Once the contents of *Gulag* were known to the secret police, there was no reason to delay its publication further. "In this act of seizure," Solzhenitsyn said, "I saw the hand of God. It meant the time had come."

After *Gulag* was published in Paris, Solzhenitsyn's position became untenable. "I and my family are ready for anything," he said in January of this year. "I have fulfilled my duty to those who perished and this gives me relief and peace of mind." His message was heard throughout the world: he was prepared for a martyr's fate—arrest, a trial, imprisonment, even death. His wife's first reaction, on being told that he was safe in Germany after his arrest, was: "It's a great misfortune."

Mrs. Solzhenitsyn's spontaneous response may sound strange to Western readers, accustomed as they are to the idea that human life is a supreme value, the willing sacrifice of it evidence of irrationality or worse. Moreover, the post-Freudian concept of human complexity lays even heroic behavior open to scrutiny. We question the existence of "pure virtue" or "pure evil," and are suspicious of the motives of anyone who claims moral purity for himself.

This is not Solzhenitsyn's view of human nature. Like the characters in his novels, people for him are essentially good or bad. And the unwavering self-assurance with which he has pursued his own goal demonstrates Solzhenitsyn's personal identification with "the righteous"—a very select company. Unlike Tolstoy, who believed that wisdom was to be found by "going to the people," Solzhenitsyn believes in the "spiritual superiority of *certain* people." Thus, Nerzhin, the hero of *The First Circle*, having shared the life of "the people" in the camps, "not as a condescending and therefore alien gentleman, but as one of them," discovers that "the People had no homespun superiority to himself." Most of them lacked "that personal *point of view* which becomes more precious than life itself."

That "point of view," according to Solzhenitsyn, arises out of hardship and suffering: through suffering "one must try to temper, to cut, to polish one's soul so as to become *a human being*." Success depends not on social origins but on strength and moral fervor. "The cultivation of one's soul," Solzhenitsyn has said, "is more important than the well-being of countless future generations." This he learned from the hardships of his own life, and it is this which he believes qualifies him for membership in the spiritual elite.

II

DESPITE differences between them, Solzhenitsyn's concern with the suffering of the Russian people reflects the commanding influence of Tolstoy on his life and his writings. Solzhenitsyn's beard, his humble dress, his disdain for material possessions, his love of hard labor, and his almost ascetic style of life are all "Tolstoyan." There are parallels as well between Solzhenitsyn's public role in Russia and the role played by Tolstoy in his time. And Tolstoy's literary influence is evident in all of Solzhenitsyn's work, reaching extreme proportions in *August 1914*, in which whole episodes are modeled on scenes from *War and Peace* and many characters are no more than latter-day simplifications of the Rostovs and the Bolkonskys. Tolstoy dominates the content of the book, too: his pictures adorn the walls of bourgeois homes, his views are followed and debated, and, in a hopelessly stereotyped scene, Tolstoy himself appears, sententiously preaching about "good" and "love."

As a novelist, however, Solzhenitsyn is no Tolstoy. In later life Tolstoy renounced his earliest (and greatest) novels, alleging that they contradicted his teachings. As his writing became increasingly didactic, it was saved from utter tediousness only by his monumental talent as an artist. It may, in fact, be said that what accounts for the incredible vitality of Tolstoy's work is the conflict between his intuitive sensibilities and his conscious goals. This conflict does not exist for Solzhenitsyn. His work, for the most part, is didactic, as he intends it to be, and it is often dull and ponderous.

Soviet readers, however, brought up on the aridities of socialist realism, have been electrified by Solzhenitsyn's concern with what he calls "eternal values" and his dealing with such forbidden themes as Stalinist terror. Zhores Medvedev, in his recent, quietly affecting tribute to Solzhenitsyn, *Ten Years After Ivan Denisovich*,* has described reading *The First Circle* in one twenty-four-hour sitting, "stopping at intervals for cups

* Knopf, 202 pp., $6.95.

of black coffee." Medvedev points out that since everyone in Soviet society has been touched in some way by terror, "many people read his books several times over . . . mentally experiencing them so acutely that they failed to notice, or ignored, subtlety of style. . . ." Although Medvedev considers Solzhenitsyn a writer of unquestionable stature, he does admit that in the case of *August 1914*, which did not have such extra-literary interest, even some Soviet readers were more critical.

The situation is different in the West, where Solzhenitsyn is probably one of the least read of best-selling novelists. Despite the inflated praise he has received from Western reviewers, whose admiration for Solzhenitsyn's courage is often mistakenly expressed as esteem for his works, many Western readers appear to find his novels heavy-handed, humorless, and monotonous. Solzhenitsyn's characters lack dimension: his heroes are all passive, prisoners not so much of themselves as of immutable circumstance. The political and philosophical theories for which the novels serve as vehicles are oversimplified and irritatingly presented with a repetitious, self-indulgent verbosity. His works often seem like morality plays, with each character representing a specific abstract idea. This is why *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the least ambitious of Solzhenitsyn's writings, is in some ways the most successful: it *is* a morality play.

There are admittedly a number of fine moments in Solzhenitsyn. Even *August 1914*, the most cumbersome of his novels, contains a few scenes—bourgeois life at the Tomchaks, Samsonov's suicide—that recall the best of Russian 19th-century realism. But Solzhenitsyn seems to tire quickly of such moments, no doubt feeling driven to go on to "weightier" problems. Like his life, Solzhenitsyn's novels have become increasingly didactic over the years. Again in a manner reminiscent of Tolstoy, he may well decide one day to abandon fiction altogether in favor of polemics; if so, *Gulag Archipelago* will have been the harbinger.

III

While all of Solzhenitsyn's writings are indictments of Soviet society, three of his works deal specifically with the Soviet penal system: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, an understated account of prison life as viewed through the eyes of a simple prisoner during the course of an "ordinary" day; *The First Circle*, a much more ambitious attempt to show how the prison-camp atmosphere affects all aspects of Soviet society; and, most definitively, *Gulag Archipelago*, a unique, exhaustive, nonfiction work which documents every aspect of the labor-camp network, building one detail upon another to create what must be the lengthiest and most excoriating account of institutionalized terror in world literature.

The "truth" that Solzhenitsyn serves in these works is not metaphysical; it is historical truth, the story of what happened in Russia after 1917. Solzhenitsyn is worried about "the amputation of the national memory"; as he explained in his *Nobel Lecture*, he wants to restore to Russia the missing chapters of her history:

> . . . literature communicates irrefutable and condensed human experience—from generation to generation. In this way it becomes the living memory of nations. In this way it keeps warm and preserves within itself its lost history in a way not subject to distortion and falsification.

Nikita Khrushchev had tentatively begun such a process of restoration, but the devastating effect of his revelations about Stalinism on the entire fabric of Soviet political society caused the process to be abruptly halted, and a full accounting was never made. Now a new generation is coming of age in the Soviet Union; it knows nothing about what happened under Stalin and *does not really care*. Unless the facts are recorded by those who witnessed them, those terrible events will be a totally forgotten chapter in Russian history. This prospect is unthinkable to Solzhenitsyn.

In *Gulag*, however, Solzhenitsyn blames not Stalin but Marxism itself for the system that destroyed millions of his countrymen:

> . . . then Stalin quietly died. But how much has the course of our ship of state changed in fact? . . . he simply followed in the footsteps.

Contrary to what has been asserted of him by some Western observers, Solzhenitsyn rejects the view that Soviet Marxism can be restored to a correct path by eliminating vestiges of Stalinism; for him Marxism itself is the corruption.

Marxism for Solzhenitsyn is the antithesis of everything Russian. "Patriotism *means* the rejection of Marxism," he has said. Western in its origins, concerned with world domination rather than internal Russian development, atheistic and totally antagonistic to spiritual values, Marxism in Solzhenitsyn's view is a dark, un-Russian force imposed by Lenin on a helpless and unprepared society: "The murky whirlwind of progressive ideology swept in on us from the West at the end of the last century and has tormented and ravaged our soul quite enough."

What alternative to Marxism does Solzhenitsyn envisage for Russia? Definitely *not* Western democracy, which he finds "weak and effete" and lacking a "built-in ethical foundation." The freedom from suffering in Western societies—freedom from that unremitting pain which Solzhenitsyn alternately deplores and reveres—has led to "complaisance and concession"; in the West people "have lost the will to live a life of deprivation, sacrifice, and firmness." And Solzhenitsyn has nothing but scorn for the workings of a democratic system in which politicians "nearly kill themselves . . . trying to gratify the masses," in which a judge "panders to the passions of society"

(by releasing Daniel Ellsberg), and in which "even the will of the majority is not immune to misdirection."

The alternative for Solzhenitsyn is not Western democracy but an idealized Russia, a Russia purified, turned inward, away from the West, to her own "vigorous, inexhaustible, spiritual strength." Solzhenitsyn's ideal Russia would be governed by "those who can direct its activities intelligently." He believes in a benevolent authoritarianism, "an authoritarian order, but one founded not on inexhaustible 'class hatred' but on love of your fellow men." An authentic reactionary, he longs for a return to Russian Orthodoxy and to the values with which "Russia lived for a thousand years."

Indeed, Solzhenitsyn appears to distrust the very freedom for which he has so long fought. He has declared that "freedom is moral . . . only if it keeps within certain bounds, beyond which it degenerates into complacency and licentiousness." He is appalled by the "innumerable drunks and hooligans who pester women in the evenings and when they are not at work." "If no police force can handle them," he has said, "still less are they going to be restrained by an *ideology* that claims to be a substitute for morality."

Solzhenitsyn combines his belief in authoritarianism with an intense nationalism. He considers it "perfectly feasible for a colossus like Russia, with all her spiritual peculiarities and folk traditions, to find its own particular path." He is an isolationist, advocating an all-Russian state with no ties to Eastern Europe or to the many nationalities that presently constitute the USSR. He is uninterested in global solutions to world problems, even those affecting Russia: "After all we have endured, it is enough for the time being for us to worry about how to save *our own* people." Yet in describing the Russian "colossus," Solzhenitsyn uses the vocabulary of great-power politics. He boasts of Russia's industrial prowess, its capability of overtaking the West, and he is disdainful of "backward" countries:

> We, a great industrial superpower, like the meanest of backward countries, invite foreigners to exploit our mineral wealth and, by way of payment, suggest that they carry off our priceless treasure, Siberian natural gas.

His *Open Letter to the Soviet Leaders* offers a chauvinistic dream for the Russia of the future, based on his analysis of the relative weakness and indirection of the Western world:

> Neither after the Crimean War, nor, more recently, after the war with Japan, nor in 1916, 1931, or 1941, would even the most unbridled patriotic soothsayer have dared to set forth so arrogant a prospect: that the time was approaching, indeed was close at hand, when all the great European powers taken together would cease to exist as a serious physical force; that their rulers would resort to all manner of concessions simply to win the favor of the rulers of the future Russia, would even vie with one another to gain that favor, just so long as the Russian press would stop abusing them; and that they would grow so weak, without losing a single war; that countries proclaiming themselves "neutral" would seek every opportunity to gratify us and pander to us; that our eternal dream of controlling *straits*, although never realized, would in the event be made irrelevant by the giant strides that Russia took into the Mediterranean and the oceans; that fear of economic losses and extra-administrative chores would become the arguments against Russian expansion to the West; and that even the mightiest transatlantic power, having emerged all-victorious from two world wars as the leader and provider for all mankind, would suddenly lose to a tiny, distant Asiatic country and show internal dissension and spiritual weakness.

IV

Reactionary, authoritarian, chauvinistic—hardly adjectives that sit comfortably with the typical image of a freedom-fighter and Nobel Prize winner. But Solzhenitsyn is a figure in whom contradictions abound. He believes in the Russian people, but does not trust them to govern themselves; outspoken against tyranny, he advocates authoritarianism; appalled by Russia's suffering, he criticizes the West for not enduring enough; opposed to war, he brags of Russia's potential for world power.

Solzhenitsyn was born in 1918, and all his life has known only the Soviet system. Some of his attitudes—his anti-modernism in literature and art, his disdain for Western "decadence," his commitment to self-sacrifice, his utopian dreams for the future—in a curious way reflect the Soviet dogma on which he was raised. Thus, for Marx's "withering away of the state" he has substituted the concept of an "authoritarianism based on love," a solution which no doubt seems to him more realistic but which in point of fact is equally unworkable; and in place of the dictatorship of the proletariat he has proposed the equally anti-democratic system of rule by a spiritual elite. Solzhenitsyn also seems affected by the attitude of paranoid suspicion toward everything foreign that pervades Soviet society. It is as much through choice as through circumstance that he has been cut off from intellectual currents in the outside world. Thus in some ways, although he has been received with adulation into the arms of the West, he seems today even more alone than ever.

And yet he is hardly without resources: his writing, his mission, and, above all, his own sense of himself. Responding recently to a Republican Senator who had called him a "citizen of the world," Solzhenitsyn said that he did not deserve the designation "since my life experience has not *yet* given me an opportunity to include the tasks and needs of the entire world." It will be interesting to see what he will make of the opportunity, now that it has forced itself upon him.