

Correspondence

Solzhenitsyn

To the Editors: My thanks for your publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's BBC interview (*Worldview*, June). This distinguished man's views should be as widely disseminated as possible; not, as some would have it, as an accurate assessment of world or Soviet realities, but as a manifestation of the Russian spirit, whether Orthodox or Communist.

Consider the following Solzhenitsyn statement: "Over the last two years terrible things have happened. The West has given up all its world positions. The West has given up not only four, five, or six countries, the West has given everything away so impetuously, has done so much to strengthen the tyranny in our country, that today all these questions are no longer relevant in the Soviet Union." What is one to make of this? Does it qualify as a serious political statement, or is it informed by passion and of a piece with his view that "Freedom is indivisible, and one has to take a moral attitude toward it"?

Again: "I wouldn't be surprised at the sudden and imminent fall of the West." This remark unites Solzhenitsyn with his Marxist-Leninist compatriots, who have said as much and every bit as fervently since 1917. And, echoing Khrushchev's famous taunt, "We shall bury you," Solzhenitsyn says that "Nuclear war is not even necessary to the Soviet Union. You can be taken simply with bare hands." Though such a remark may provide some sort of cold comfort to the zealots in Ronald Reagan's wake, it hardly qualifies as a statement of political reality.

Indeed, many of Solzhenitsyn's remarks sound curiously like those from the American far right. "You think that this is a respite [détente], but this is an imaginary respite, it's a respite before destruction." Or, "But today you don't have to be a strategist to understand why Angola is being taken. What for? This is one of the most recent positions from which to wage world war most successfully. A wonderful position in the Atlantic." And again: "The navy: Britain

used to have a navy; now it is the Soviet Union that has the navy, control of the seas, bases." And to complete the picture of Armageddon: "I don't know how many countries have still to be taken; maybe the Soviet tanks have to come to London for your defense minister to say at last that the Soviet Union has finally passed the test."

With a mind given to such vivid imagery surely the late Lyndon Johnson might have found a place for Solzhenitsyn on his staff. But if we interpret his remarks as no more than inflammatory cold war rhetoric we miss the point. Solzhenitsyn is not, as some have said, "to the right of the Czars" in his politics. Rather is he a pure Russian spirit: noble, apolitical, and antibourgeois. The matter was most ably summarized by Nikolai Berdyaev:

"The religious formation of the Russian spirit developed several stable attributes: dogmatism, asceticism, the ability to endure suffering and to make sacrifices for the sake of its faith, *whatever that may be* [emphasis added], a reaching out to the transcendental, in relation now to eternity, to the other world, now to the future, to this world. The religious energy of the Russian spirit possesses the faculty of switching over and directing itself to purposes which are not merely religious, for example, to social objects. In virtue of their religious-dogmatic quality of spirit, Russians—whether orthodox, heretics or schismatics—are always apocalyptic or nihilist."

All of which suggests that our appreciation of Russia's Marxist-Leninist ideology and rhetoric as well as our understanding of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, would be well served by a deeper knowledge of the Russian past, lest we in the bourgeois West be tempted to take either's statements at face value.

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The Next President...

To the Editors: [In response to the *Worldview* symposium, "That Person Should Be the Next President Who..." in the January-February, March, and April issues.] It is commonplace these days to observe that American foreign policy no longer reflects a clear national

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WORLDVIEW

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