

# 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

(Continued on p. 58)

# WORLDVIEW

## Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Worldview* is to place public policies, particularly in international affairs, under close ethical scrutiny. The Council on Religion and International Affairs, which sponsors the journal, was founded in 1914 by religious and civic leaders brought together by Andrew Carnegie. It was mandated to work toward ending the barbarity of war, to encourage international cooperation, and to promote justice. The Council is independent and nonsectarian. *Worldview* is an important part of the Council's wide-ranging program in pursuit of these goals.

*Worldview* is open to diverse viewpoints and encourages dialogue and debate on issues of public significance. It is edited in the belief that large political questions cannot be considered adequately apart from ethical and religious reflection. The opinions expressed in *Worldview* do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Council. Through *Worldview* the Council aims to advance the national and international exchange without which our understanding will be dangerously limited.

Philip A. Johnson, *Publisher*

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## Prisoners of Conscience in the USSR: Their Treatment and Conditions

(Amnesty International; 154 pp.; \$2.00 [paper])

Amnesty International recognizes that it is very difficult to determine how many Soviet citizens are now imprisoned for no other reason than political or religious dissent. The compilers of this unusually thorough report finally, and somewhat arbitrarily, accept the proposition that 1 per cent of the total prison population falls into that category, thus calculating there are from 10,000 to 25,000 "prisoners of conscience" in the Soviet Union (total prison population estimates run from 1-2.5 million). The terror, constant intimidation, psychiatric manipulation, and other brutalities directed against prisoners make clear that the Gulag Archipelago is not ancient history. The book contains a helpful summary of the ways in which information about political prisoners in the USSR is gathered and authenticated.

## The Miracle of Jimmy Carter by Howard Norton and Bob Slosser

(Logos; 134 pp.; \$1.95 [paper])

The focus is on Carter as a born again Christian, but the relevant political material, most of it familiar by now, is included. With very few exceptions there is nothing new in information or interpretation, since the book draws heavily on Carter's own *Why Not the Best?* and on widely published interviews, such as Bill Moyers's early and extended PBS discussion with Carter on the relationship between Christianity and political practice. Precisely because it gathers so much together, however, the book is as useful a summary of Carter's background and positions as is to be found between two covers to date. (Logos, the publisher, is based in Plainfield, New Jersey, and specializes in books for charismatic and usually conservative Christians.)

## Correspondence (from p. 2)

consensus about what our role in the world ought to be (or, for that matter, what it now is). Current foreign policy debates are not simply about tactics; they reflect fundamentally differing values and presuppositions. It is not just that we disagree about *what* we should do; we don't even agree about *why* anything should be done.

Given our lack of agreement on the goals, purposes, and values that should guide our foreign policy, and given our radically differing perceptions of present international realities, it is no wonder that we can't agree about what ought to be done—about the kind of foreign policy strategy we should pursue. But it is not only in our view of world affairs that we have lost our bearings. There has been an even more fundamental breakdown in the fabric of attitudes and beliefs that have sustained our political community here at home.

We are no longer a nation possessed of the confidence to articulate great purposes and pursue large goals; we no longer embody a commitment to advancing a sense of common purpose against the demands of a myriad of separatist currents; we no longer have agencies (including a strong Presidency) invested with sufficient legitimacy and authority to carry out policies aimed at serving the common good; and we no longer believe that the central moral and political values of the American experience have any relevance to the challenges we face beyond our borders. Dr. Kissinger and some of his critics to the "right" are quite correct in saying that the fundamental problem is one of will. So lacking are we a gathered sense of purpose and the will to pursue it, it is something of a wonder that we have a foreign policy at all, regardless of its content or direction.

If so negative and pessimistic an assessment of our national condition is accurate, then what we need in our next President is, of course, a sort of secular savior who can lay indisputable claim to our hearts and minds and lead us, as it were, to the promised land. It is unlikely, given the nature of human politics (much less the current crop of Presidential aspirants), that such a messiah will soon appear on the electoral horizon. It is even less likely that, if one did appear, we would be ready to follow. And that is the crux of the problem: The

American people are not now prepared to respond to the kind of leadership it would take to make this country a positive and creative force for progress toward a more peaceful and humane world order.

Four years ago it would have been fair, I think, to characterize the mood of an influential segment of the foreign policy-attentive public largely in terms of the "unlessons" of the Vietnam war: that America was the single villain in the Vietnam tragedy; that our policies there were not accidental or mistaken but were the necessary consequences of the racist, corrupt, imperialist, and oppressive character of American society; and that the *only* right thing for us to do was to "get out." These core teachings that originated in the "radical" anti-Vietnam war movement have influenced—and their broader implications have come to dominate—much of the liberal community. In 1972 the Democratic Party put forward a candidate whose foreign policy views reflected these broader lessons:

...that American policy has been the primary obstacle to constructive change in the Third World;

...that our policies toward the Communist world have been marked by hysterical overreaction to threats which, if they do exist at all, are not nearly so dire as our leaders would have us believe;

...that, in fact, most of the world's major problems are the result of American overinvolvement (political, military, economic, cultural intervention) in the affairs of other nations;

...and that, therefore, we ought to establish a new ordering of national priorities aimed at "setting our own house in order," rather than trying to be the world's policeman or social worker.

McGovern lost the election. But that view of this country's role in world affairs continues to influence public attitudes toward foreign policy.

Added to this liberal isolationist thrust was a severe crisis of confidence in the structures and processes of our political system—a crisis brought on by the Watergate affair and reinforced and extended by the wave of (primarily) liberal attacks on the Presidency and on the very concept of legitimate authority in our political community. The attacks were a culmination at the national level in the mainstream of American society of currents of antiauthority, anti-institution, and separatist sentiments

that had been building in the "cause world" since the early sixties. The domestic corollary of the liberal idea of the world as a place in which "nobody is in charge" (to use Norman Podhoretz's apt phrase) became that of a nation in which "nobody is in charge."

But the attempt to turn away from responsibility for active engagement in world affairs has foundered on some hard realities. The Arab oil embargo, the continuing Middle East conflict, the growth of Soviet military power and the acting out of their strategic ambitions, the desperate need for new approaches to problems of resources and trade—these and other factors have combined to produce a significant shift in our national mood. More and more people, even in those strongholds of liberal influence—the university, the church, the media, the Congress—are coming to a recognition that American interests and power are inextricably bound up in the common destiny of a fragile, nascent world community. And the question has once again entered the public debate: What should be our response to the realities of power and conflict in a world dominated by the threat of war? Along with this recognition and in response to the need to answer this question has come a growing concern for the health of our body politic, on which the vitality of our foreign policy depends.

Unfortunately, this shift in our national mood is not following a pattern of growth toward a new and more hopeful understanding of our role in the world. The pattern is more nearly that of a manic-depressive shift of mood, a pendulumlike swing from the bad answer of "do nothing" to an equally disastrous answer: a return to primary reliance on national military power to defend our values and interests and to force changes in the policies and behavior of adversary nations. We may well see in 1980 a political climate that is exactly the obverse of that which fostered the McGovern campaign in 1972—a strong national consensus supporting an active, dominantly military foreign policy to meet very real threats to our security and the world's.

And so it is likely to go.

What we need in our next President is someone who refuses to swing with the pendulum, who recognizes that we must find a better alternative than either of the two choices now being offered us. That Presidential candidate would command

my support and respect who:

...first, puts at the top of the agenda that question of this country's role in the world, not because certain foreign policy issues offer exploitable handles in the campaign, but because he recognizes that this is the central question of our time;

...second, combines in an approach to foreign policy the truths that are at the centers of both sides in the current debate—on the one hand, that we must move beyond a dominantly military foreign policy in order to build a more humane and peaceful world, and, on the other, that we must confront squarely the obstacles posed by the realities of power organized in opposing political camps;

...third, articulates a credible vision of a radically transformed world order—a disarmed world under law possessing instruments of authority and processes of cooperation capable of dealing with global problems of human survival and freedom;

...fourth, recognizes that present patterns of negotiation in the context of primary reliance on national military power will not produce the dynamic needed for progress toward that goal; that a more radical strategy is needed that seeks through nonmilitary initiatives to bring about needed changes in other nations' attitudes and policies and thus make possible the international agreement that now eludes us;

...and finally, persuades us, because of the quality of his character and understanding of what our third century requires of us as a nation, that the pursuit of so large and good a goal is the only way to bring us together again—that the world is crying for the kind of leadership we could provide and that we as a nation are meant for it.

But it is in the nature of our political system that the American people get the kind of President they want and, in a sense, deserve. At this point it is difficult to be optimistic about the prospects for a significant change in the dominant currents of attitude and belief that shape our national mood. For the people who could contribute most to the search for a new, more adequate foreign policy direction—the people who recognize that radical changes are needed in the international system if we are to survive—are too often the ones most responsible for the polarization, sterility, and lack of clarity and intelligence in the public debate. It is they who

embody the reactive political currents that have contributed so much to our present disarray. That they see our condition as cause for celebration rather than dismay is one more measure of the depths of our confusion.

Those, on the other hand, who recognize that the real problem is located, not in this country's values and institutions, but in the realities of a dangerous and conflict-ridden world are the least willing to accept responsibility for defining new purposes and nonmilitary strategies more adequate to progress toward a better world. They are willing to accept the very grave dangers of continued reliance on war and the threat of war, and that willingness will sooner or later spell catastrophe for us all.

Until this situation changes I will have to continue to give this answer: *That person should be the next President who represents the least inadequate of a not very hopeful lot.*

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## China: A Footnote

To the Editors: A note of possible interest on the Chinese earthquake: The official custom of generally isolating foreigners in palatial quarters away from the congested areas where the Chinese everyman lives may have saved many foreign lives. Let's hope fervently that the authorities' fear of revealing true internal conditions will not prevent their seeking foreign aid this time for the Chinese victims.

The earthquake is undoubtedly having a strong psychological impact on the Chinese population at this time of Mao's decline and imminent change of "dynasty." Such natural disaster is traditionally interpreted by Chinese as a sign of Heaven's wrath against a corrupt and despotic regime, particularly if a woman is wielding supreme power. (Mao's wife, Chiang Ch'ing, is only too obvious.) It's a sign that the end is near. Superstitious or not, every Chinese thinks of this automatically.

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