

Writers Under the Heirs of Stalin

Abraham Rothberg

The lash—
is a medicine,
although it isn't exactly honey.
The foundation of the state
is direction,
direction.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Remembering the role writers and intellectuals played in the Hungarian revolt of 1956 and in the Czechoslovak liberalization from 1966 to 1968, the Soviet authorities are determined to see that Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's works, as well as those of a number of other Soviet writers, bring neither increased turbulence at home nor decreased prestige and power for the Soviet Union and its leadership abroad. If they are uneasy about Solzhenitsyn's "blackening the image" of the USSR, about his providing grist for foreign "anti-Soviet" propaganda mills, they are increasingly resentful of the position that Solzhenitsyn, willy-nilly, has come to occupy as the leader of the "domestic opposition." Many would, with justice, confer such a title on Pyotr Yakir or Andrei Sakharov or General Grigorenko, but in some respects Solzhenitsyn speaks for all dissidents in a voice they respect and admire; what he says in his books is given international attention of a kind not usually accorded to others.

Solzhenitsyn's publications in the West have displeased the Soviet leaders, yet his books have given the novelist a continuing leverage with the regime while making it even more concerned about effectively silencing or controlling him. The Brezhnev-

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Kosygin regime has not been eager to use the outright and most coercive Stalinist methods of the past against him, but that it is determined to bring the novelist to heel is unquestionable. Soviet leaders have had long—and for the writers, tragic—experience in "handling" literary mavericks (not to speak of other kinds of mavericks) with an arsenal that includes censorship, denial of publication, ostracism, harassment, blackmail, confinement in mental institutions, exile, imprisonment, and execution. The present Soviet authorities have, in general, refrained from using the most violent such measures against writers, especially those with some international reputation. When they thought the occasion required it, however, as in the trials of Sinyavsky and Daniel, for instance, the rulers of the Soviet Union continued to be quite adept at using all the instruments of neo-Stalinist terror.

However much Soviet leaders protest to the contrary, and however much they consciously tarnish their reputation when they feel their power seriously challenged or important doctrinal issues at stake (witness the lengths to which they were willing to go in sending armies into Hungary in 1956 and into Czechoslovakia in 1968), they remain extraordinarily sensitive about their "image" abroad. Because they have for decades put themselves forward as the leaders of "progressive" causes and Russia as the "motherland of socialism," because they have built a modern Potemkin façade to distract the unwary in the rest of the world about the virtues and accomplishments of their system, and because it is important for them to retain the loyalty of their many sympathizers and of Communist Party members abroad, they pay very careful attention to any Soviet writer or dissident who would disabuse people at home or abroad about Soviet intentions and who would disillusion them about "Soviet reality."

Other reasons, more difficult to define but persistent nonetheless—the relations of Moscow to the

Communist International, to take only one obvious and relatively recent example—have their origins far back in Russian history and deep in the Russian psyche, both of which have often revealed the most abject sense of inferiority to the West while simultaneously asserting a compensatory and overweening Slavic feeling of superiority and “manifest destiny.” Andrei Amalrik, who has an ironic view of his people, has written: “The idea of justice is motivated [in Russia] by the hatred of everything that is outstanding, which we make no effort to imitate, but, on the contrary, try to bring down to our level. . . . This psychology is, of course, most typical of the peasantry . . . and those of peasant origin constitute the overwhelming majority in our country.”¹

Solzhenitsyn’s writings have made him the best-known Soviet literary figure abroad since Boris Pasternak and the same kind of focus of controversy at home. But Pasternak was a more subtle and eccentric writer, less willing and less able to become a leader of a literary or political opposition; he was a man obsessed primarily with his private life and his art,² although he was not unaware of how the Soviet state impinged on the lives of individuals, as *Doctor Zhivago* so clearly shows. Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, writes more simply and straightforwardly and is therefore comprehensible to much wider audiences than was Pasternak. Though each man wrote about the life he knew and lived, each belonged to a different generation, and the experiences of Solzhenitsyn’s generation are closer to the present-day Soviet audience, particularly the youth. Whereas the main action of *Doctor Zhivago*, for instance, takes place during the period 1903 to 1929, with a brief epilogue and conclusion set at the end of World War II, Solzhenitsyn’s writings have World War II as a background, and most of his works are set in postwar Soviet Russia, and thus have greater impact and appeal for contemporary readers. If, as Anatoly Surkov has said, Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* “goes so far as to cast doubt upon the validity of the October Revolution, describing it as almost the greatest crime in Russian history,”³ Solzhenitsyn’s works document the bankruptcy of the system which was built on that revolution. In spite of his personal shyness and retiring nature, Solzhenitsyn is a man obsessed by the injustices done to his people and himself. He is compelled to bear witness to the injuries that have been inflicted on him and that symbolize what the country has endured, and at the same time to try to prevent their repetition. Whereas Pasternak evidently knew when and how to accommodate himself to the regime in order to survive, and was even sufficiently terrorized by Khrushchev to repudiate the Nobel Prize, Solzhenitsyn has so far refused to kiss the rod, has stood his ground; he has accepted the Nobel Prize and resisted the regime’s commands in a way that Pasternak, both because of his character

and because most of his life was spent under Stalin, could not.

This courageous personal commitment, exemplified in his life and writing, has made Solzhenitsyn a symbol of conscience in the Soviet Union, a rallying point for those who would loosen the reins of tyranny, and a political *cause célèbre* at home and abroad. These roles, domestic and foreign, compounded of reality and myth, have displeased the Soviet authorities. Consequently, the Swedish Academy’s award of the Nobel Prize to Solzhenitsyn for carrying on the ethical traditions of Russian literature could only exacerbate their displeasure—and simultaneously give additional leverage, an added measure of personal safety, to Solzhenitsyn. One does not, even in the Soviet Union, jail a Nobel Prize winner with impunity. In the circumstances, Soviet leaders were bound to remember that often repeated saying which swept through the Moscow intelligentsia after the publication of Solzhenitsyn’s first novel: “Tell me what you think of *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and I will tell you what you are.”

Solzhenitsyn also represents the new Soviet generation, which has not yet risen to the most important seats of power. Born in 1918, he is, unlike Pasternak, altogether a product of the Soviet system, and it is difficult to accuse him of being tainted by a former “bourgeois” life, as was done with Pasternak. He has never been abroad, except during the fighting of World War II, and then only in Poland and East Germany, and has few foreign friends and connections. His war record and his public stance, as well as his books, demonstrate that he is a man who loves his native land with that curious and intense ambivalence that afflicts almost all the best Russian writers—a man who has consciously accepted the role of a conscience for his people and his country.

Whatever the changes in “theory” or in the political exigencies, there is continuous regime hostility to, and repression of, the works of any Soviet writers who criticize any important aspect of Soviet life—especially those who would restore the truth to Soviet history and to the Soviet people’s picture of themselves and their lives, as well as those who would jettison or resist the leading role of the Party, who would deny that Marxism-Leninism is a perfect philosophy or that its so-called embodiment in the Soviet system is either perfect or on its way to perfection, or who would defend individuals’ rights to private lives and put them beyond the Party’s control and indoctrination. The Soviet rulers do need “good” books, books good enough for their people to want to read, but only such good books as do their bidding. Since Stalin came to power, the Soviet authorities have not been able to elicit such books from their writers, either from those most faithful to their cause or from those alienated from it, because good books cannot be written to order.

Given the rulers' insistence on Party tutelage in the arts and their compulsive need to control every aspect of the creative process, their failure is no surprise.

The Russian writer can write for the desk drawer, or for an audience abroad—dangerous, frustrating, and in important ways artistically debilitating—or confine himself to that small audience he can reach through the *samizdat* network, with all its myriad shortcomings. All these choices are ultimately unsatisfactory to truly creative Russian artists, yet the regime will permit them no other choice, because it is truly terrified and horrified by the freedom to create. The Soviet authorities have seen how often “liberating” literature has had powerful political repercussions antithetical to their interests; liberating literature frequently does just that: it liberates. It is a tribute to their respect for the power of the word that the Soviet rulers watch it so carefully, reward it so well, and praise it so fulsomely—when it does their bidding; but trust it they do not.

The regime's treatment of those who publish abroad is qualitatively different in hostility and repressiveness. The treatment of, say, Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak (for *Doctor Zhivago*), Sinyavsky and Daniel, Yesenin-Volpin, and even Yevtushenko, for publishing his *A precocious Autobiography* in France without government approval or censorship, has been much more savage than the treatment of Ehrenburg for *The Thaw*, or Dudintsev for *Not by Bread Alone*, or even Viktor Nekrasov for *Both Sides of the Ocean*. Exceptions have been made, evidently for special reasons, for such works published abroad as Evgenia Ginzburg's *Journey Into the Whirlwind* and Lydia Chukovskaya's *The Deserted House*, ostensibly because those books were published without the authors' consent. Yet many government reprisals against writers are difficult to uncover. Whether this difference derives from a realistic estimate by the regime of the use “hostile” agencies are able to make of such critical works or simply evinces the leaders' rage and frustration against “their own people” being put beyond “their” control is difficult to determine, but both factors probably contribute. The fact that writers elude their control may account for the viciousness the Soviet leaders exercise against the authors of such works and would explain the extra margin of vengefulness in dealing with Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak, and Yesenin-Volpin. In addition, the authorities probably recognize, consciously or otherwise, that their most gifted writers are least susceptible to direction and coercion, with perhaps the single exception of Sholokhov. Sholokhov's great gifts have continued to be put at the service of the government in recent years—though he has resisted censorship and bureaucratic meddling in his own writing—and he has, as Chukovskaya so acidly reminded him, paid the price for political orthodoxy in failure of creativity.

Though it may seem hard to accept the fact that

sentencing Sinyavsky and Daniel to concentration camps or confining Yesenin-Volpin to an insane asylum or exiling Brodsky and Amalrik to the miseries of hauling manure in primitive *kolkhozes* is much better than what was meted out to writers under Stalin, such punishments are less harsh than what happened in that time when they were sent to Siberian camps to be worked or starved to death, or were murdered outright. The regime's willingness to permit writers like Pasternak, Tarsis, and Solzhenitsyn to emigrate is also a difference in kind, although such permissions were given in the past to a number of writers, Evgeny Zamyatin among them. Does this mean that the Soviet leaders are willing to accept the ill repute such actions generate in exchange for the advantages of branding exiled writers renegades, traitors, and émigrés before the Russian people? Such a course is likely effective with the Soviet masses, who in their xenophobic paranoia think of the friend of their enemy as their enemy, and who are by and large indifferent or hostile to intellectuals, writers, and students. But is it effective with intellectuals, whose loyalties the regime must retain in order to exploit their skills?

Even if the Soviet rulers permitted a degree of creative freedom they seem never even to have considered, it is unlikely that an important literature would emerge in the USSR for a long time. Such literature requires layer on layer of writers and writing as “seedbed” for great writers and great works. Russian writers are not without gifts, but they have not been permitted to exercise those gifts, to have intercourse with other writers, and to read writings published outside the country, to breathe the air of world culture, for almost forty years. Police terror and censorship have instilled a profound wariness, an internal censorship and inhibition in most Soviet writers that must be difficult to surmount; and if some few do surmount them, it is at the cost of great creative energy which might otherwise go into their work. Stifled since the 1930's, at least two generations of Russian writers have been deprived of their heritage or have surrendered it for a pot of message. As a consequence, who, outside the Communist bloc, has been interested in a Soviet writer or painter or sculptor during the past four decades? There are exceptions—Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak, the sculptor Ernst Neizvestny, the painter Glazounov—but they are rare. In this context, Peter Benno accurately remarks:

This extraordinary Soviet reverence for the servants of the Muses has no small impact abroad, where a Yevtushenko or a Voznesensky, a Dudintsev or a Solzhenitsyn is translated into all the languages of Europe and achieves an international success of the sort that few Western writers, even the most major enjoy. A St.-John Perse or an Auden, for instance, might well envy the number of translations and the general notoriety accorded to the work of Yevtushenko. The wide public success and the profound social impact of post-

Stalinist Soviet literature constitute a phenomenon unique in the cultural life of any modern nation.⁴

But such international "interest" is fundamentally political—not literary or cultural—and the "extraordinary Soviet reverence for the servants of the Muses" seems confined to a relatively small portion of the Soviet population, however large it seems in the West. Only in music, of all the creative arts—to distinguish them from the performing arts—where Party censorship and "socialist realism" are more difficult, if not impossible, to impose, have the Soviets been able to produce distinguished art and artists—and the artists have all too often had their work and careers botched and truncated by the stupidity and provincialism of Party bureaucrats. Here, too, Benno's assessment seems substantially apt and just:

Khrushchevian Moscow is very far from being—or ever becoming—another Periclean Athens, Medicean Florence, or Alexandrine Petersburg. Despite the wishful thinking that in both Russia and the West often colors the view of this cultural flowering, in actual fact the literary merit of most (if not all) of the great successes of the post-Stalin era is low by any standards and in particular—to take the example closest in time and culture—by comparison with the works of the generation of Russia's "Silver Age" in the first three decades of the present century.

Not long ago, in a burst of unaccustomed candor, the Soviet novelist Leonid Leonov declared, "People will be writing about the Soviet concentration camps for the next eighty years." Since between eight and twenty million people were imprisoned and perished in Stalin's camps and since almost no family in the Soviet Union remained untouched, Leonov's prophecy is more than literary hyperbole. Because the victims of the Soviet camps began to be released only after Stalin's death and "rehabilitated" only after the Twentieth Congress in 1956, the first "witness" writing has only begun to emerge—as much of it as can, stifled as it is by Kremlin censorship. That brief period during which Khrushchev lifted the censorship long enough for Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* to appear was adequate for verifying and corroborating the powerful repercussions of candor in Soviet life, and to show to what extent Solzhenitsyn spoke to the popular mind and perhaps for the popular heart. Again and again he portrayed the Soviet state as a police state, the Soviet Union as a prison and concentration camp; his works have steadily pointed to the heirs of Stalin as accomplices in Stalin's crimes—crimes which remain unpunished, perpetrated by criminals who are not only still at large but still in power.

Just as the Germans had to come to terms with Hitler and the Nazi crimes, so too the Russians must come to terms with Stalin and the Stalinist crimes. But such a confrontation and resolution are far more

difficult to achieve in the Soviet Union, because it won the war and because substantially the same people remain in power. Any genuine reevaluation of the Stalinist past must call into question many, if not all, of the underpinnings of Soviet society, particularly the Party's monopoly of power, wisdom, and truth, and it must lead to the trial and punishment of those who were responsible for the crimes against the Soviet people. In such proceedings the heirs of Stalin, from Brezhnev and Kosygin down to the factory informer and the concentration-camp guard, might be held accountable. Thus threatened, they are understandably reluctant to permit, much less encourage, such an accounting, because it would surely have repercussions as great as and even more far-reaching than those of the Nuremberg trials.

Disavowing the Stalinist past and jettisoning Stalin's heritage while holding on to power and privilege are virtually impossible for the heirs of Stalin. For that reason alone, Khrushchev's de-Stalinization had to be rolled back by Brezhnev and Kosygin, who saw the fear and the restiveness in the ranks of the bureaucrats, and who themselves feared that the demoralization of the bureaucracy might have unforeseen and untoward consequences. The stubborn resistance of those who oppose de-Stalinization, liberalization, and reform is not rooted simply in doctrinal differences; it is, in effect, the desperate struggle of the members of a power elite defending their very lives, positions, privileges, and property. Any denigration of Stalin denigrates them, any assault on him or his record is an attack on them and their records, because they were Stalin's men. If he was a criminal, they were his accomplices; if he was inept, they shared his incompetence; if his achievement must be reevaluated, so too must theirs. Thoroughgoing de-Stalinization would, consequently, involve naming names and places and dates, and assigning blame; it would involve purges, trials, and punishments on such a scale that it would not only threaten the heirs of Stalin personally but might overturn the entire edifice of Soviet power.

Many of those in the forefront of the struggle to reform Soviet society are individuals who attack the evils of Soviet institutions and the legacy of Stalinism not only out of a love of truth and justice but because they themselves have personally endured the lash or have had parents, grandparents, other relatives, or friends who have done so.

Wherever the K.G.B. arrested, interrogated, tortured, imprisoned, exiled, or executed, it made immediate and probably permanent enemies of the family, relatives, friends, and colleagues of the victims. All these people who survived are eager to see the wrongs of the past redressed, even if they are not eager to redress those wrongs themselves. They want to be avenged, even if they do not yet feel able to avenge themselves or their kin. They are the natural constituency of those who are *actively* trying to right

the wrongs of the Soviet past, to reform the institutions of Soviet society in the present so that such crimes will be more difficult to perpetrate in the future. It is a constituency far larger than the tiny group of brave dissidents who form the nucleus of the Democratic Movement, though far smaller than many Western observers who hope for liberalization and reform in the USSR imagine. Terror has been bred into the Russians' bones for half a century and more.

The generational conflict between fathers and sons is inextricably bound up with this struggle against the heirs of Stalin. As young Germans were forced to look at their Nazi fathers and ask, "Where were you when . . . ?" so, too, Russian youth have been forced to face their forebears and ask what they were doing during collectivization, the purges, and all the other crimes of the Stalinist era. The regime-promoted explanation—"We didn't know what was happening"—is only the Communist equivalent of the Eichmann argument—"I was a little man and helpless; I only carried out orders." It will no more wash in Soviet circumstances than it did in German ones. Moreover, many among the youth know that their fathers *did* know, that by active cooperation, apathy, fear, or indifference they supported and permitted the Stalinist depredations. One of the hallmarks the younger generation sees in the writings of many of the liberal writers—Solzhenitsyn, Ehrenburg, Nekrasov, Chukovskaya—is the public confirmation that the older generation knew and abetted, or knew and, as Ehrenburg publicly confessed, "gritted its teeth and remained silent." Between the two generations there lies the question of "clean hands," and until it is resolved the youth will continue to lack confidence in the probity of their elders. Gaining the confidence of and influencing the youth are consequently essential goals in the battle between the dogmatists and reformists.

If the heirs of Stalin could persuade the next generation of the rightness of their views, they would be able to keep their power and privilege—and their heads. Ultimately, by co-opting the next generation's members into the hierarchy, they would implicate them in the Stalinist past and the neo-Stalinist present so that the new generation's hands would be dirtied because it was involved with the perpetrators of the crimes of old and with the privileges of the new. The myth of Party infallibility might then persist, and the fundamental institutions of Soviet power could remain intact. The struggle would be postponed a generation; Stalin's, Khrushchev's, Brezhnev's, and Kosygin's heirs would then have to be called to account by *their* sons. So the conflict will continue until the crimes recede so far into the past that their sting is removed while the repressive institutions and their personnel in the present and future gradually change and are responsible for no new

great crimes. If that happens, the new heirs will not be held responsible for the accumulated burdens of the past. If it does not, the conflict will go on until those who committed the crimes are called to account and punished.

This life-and-death struggle is intimately involved with writing, because literature has become the arena for telling the truth, for restoring accuracy to Soviet history, which could, as Solzhenitsyn's books already have, call into question all the lies, evasions, hypocrisy, and half-truths with which the regime has endeavored to deal with the injustices of the Soviet past. The post-Stalin memoirs are almost all attempts to set the record straight, to pin down facts, to rescue reputations from oblivion or obloquy—too often posthumously. As General Aleksander Gorbatov put it when he explained why he had written his memoirs, *Years off My Life*: "The aim of my story is to tell the young generation about these people." By *these people* he meant the Stalinists and their heirs. But the moment truthful revelations of the past began to appear, the heirs of Stalin were faced with all the same problems all over again; wherever they turned, they were threatened by the present and future and hemmed in by the past.

Who was responsible for the persecutions of the past? If those who committed such crimes are alive, why have they not been tried and punished? How did such errors and crimes occur under Soviet law and arise out of Soviet institutions in the first place? How, for example, could such a paranoid criminal as Stalin come to power and remain in power in "socialist" circumstances? Is the rise of a Stalin inherent in the system and its logical expression? Once Khrushchev and Mikoyan had made their de-Stalinization speeches at the Twentieth Congress, such questions became inescapable; once one stitch is pulled in the skein, the whole fabric of lies, distortions, and omissions begins to unravel. The assiduously cultivated myth of the Party's infallibility perishes ignominiously, and the Party is revealed as arrogant and ignorant, its top leaders as blindly ruling with the basest motives of lust for power and greed, dancing the *gopka* to the tune that Stalin played, because they were craven and cowardly.

Stalin's heirs have had to postulate answers to such questions, and in the years since his demise—more particularly since the Twentieth Congress—they have proclaimed a position. In spite of Stalin, they contend, the Soviet people, led by the glorious Communist Party, have gone ahead to turn the Soviet Union into a "socialist" state, the second most powerful nation on earth, have won the war against the Nazis, have sent rockets to the moon, and have built atomic weapons. In short, though Stalin made "errors" and was the cause of "distortions," the people and the Party in mystically separate ways "built socialism." Party spokesmen have had to refer-

bish Stalin's reputation, to insist that although he did make errors, he was also responsible for "building communism" and winning the war and was at heart a good Party man. "Stalin was dedicated to Communism with his whole being. Everything he did was for Communism."⁵ Yevtushenko, in "The Heirs of Stalin," reveals how emotionally powerful if completely contradictory such an argument is by denying to Stalin and his evils credit for both industrialization and winning the war:

I refer not to the past, so holy and glorious,
of Turksib,
and Magnitka,
and the flag raised over Berlin.⁶

In *A Precocious Autobiography*, Yevtushenko says even more revealingly:

I think the broad masses [of the Russian people] sensed intuitively that something was wrong, but no one wanted to believe what he guessed at heart. It would have been too terrible.

The Russian people preferred to work rather than to think and to analyze. With a heroic, stubborn self-sacrifice unprecedented in history they built power station after power station, factory after factory. They worked in furious desperation, drowning with the thunder of machines, tractors, and bulldozers the cries that might have reached them across the barbed wire of Siberian concentration camps.⁷

Yet, if Stalin did succeed in industrializing the nation and in winning the war, what was the price? It is that question, of *the means*, which is carefully avoided by almost all the writers as well as by all the leadership—and it is a question Solzhenitsyn is always asking. Was so much killing and suffering necessary? Couldn't industrialization and winning the war have been accomplished by other means? Solzhenitsyn goes even further, for he shows that the means were not only cruel but they were also wasteful and inept: labor efficiency was low; materials were wasted; people had no incentive to work; there were no proper arms or leadership during the early stages of the war, nor was there adequate preparation for the war, militarily or diplomatically or industrially; and some of the best people were either killed in purges or imprisoned for arbitrary and often meaningless reasons.

The heirs of Stalin exhort the writers to turn away from poking into the "refuse heaps of history" and to turn to the people's positive achievements: to Turksib and Magnitka, not to Vorkuta and Norilsk. And behind their exhortation is the threat of the K.G.B. and the camps. But as Robert Conquest aptly phrased it, "Art symbolizes an alternative allegiance"⁸—and alternative allegiances are precisely what the Kremlin will not countenance. Art is not the only expression of nonconformity; miniskirts, long hair, tight trousers or bell-bottoms, and rock-and-roll music can also become ways of asserting individuality, and therefore can come to be considered forms of re-

bellion and opposition by a regime obsessed with imposing conformity and orthodoxy. Literature and the other arts provide métiers which by their very nature deny that the Party has a monopoly on the intellectual and emotional imagination.

It is obviously the social (as opposed to the aesthetic) importance of the artist that draws 14,000 people to a poetry reading or that sells 100,000 copy editions over night. In a country where there are no non-official newspaper editorials, Yevtushenko's "editorials in verse" understandably find an audience and a following which poets in no other country can command. This occurs when the verse editorials are not explicitly concerned with political or social questions. With official Soviet literature still attempting to reduce the whole of life to the public and collective task of "building Communism"—in other words, to the purposes of the state—a personal lyric or an amorous outpouring is an act of social protest, proclaiming by its mere existence the desirability of the autonomy of the private and intimate life from state control.⁹

Another aspect of the quarrel between fathers and sons is the weariness and boredom many of the sons evince in the face of the perpetual plans, demonstrations, meetings, exhortations, the continual invasion of personal and private life. The same quarrel persists between the Writers' Union bureaucratic elders and the younger writers who, as Ehrenburg remarked, "want to write about their inner world, about delicate and controversial subjects. They want new writing; they want satire; and this has very little to do with either the war or the latest computer invented by a Russian engineer of genius."¹⁰ Paeans to Turksib and Magnitka, or to sputnik, are not subject matter that attracts writers; Yevtushenko's comment on what does attract writers is germane: "To a Russian the word 'poet' has overtones of the word 'fighter.' Russia's poets were always fighters for the future of their country and for justice. Her poets helped Russia think. Her poets helped Russia to struggle against her tyrants."¹¹ It is precisely this role of Russia's writers that the heirs of Stalin would scotch, and precisely this role that Solzhenitsyn has taken as his own.

In spite of the courage and eloquence of Solzhenitsyn and that small group of dedicated men who have fought for liberalization of the Soviet police state, the Russian people seem to have remained indifferent. The masses seem as hostile to the Solzhenitsyns, Yakirs, Yesenin-Volpins, and Grigorenkos as the Party press reports. At no point in the alternating freezes and thaws of Soviet life have the Russian masses shown any interest in, or had any influence on, the outcome of the conflicts of power and policy. In fact, in the continuing battle in the top reaches of the Party and government, whether between Malenkov and Beria, or Molotov and Khrushchev, or Khrushchev and Brezhnev—or more accurately perhaps, between the groups those names

represent—there has never been the slightest concern on the part of the Kremlin with what the people would say or do, nor have the people shown any desire to play a role in the decisions which so intimately affect their destiny. As Andrei Amalrik noted: “The country passively awaited its fate. While struggle was going on continuously ‘at the top,’ not a single voice ‘from below’ was heard challenging the orders which at any given moment were handed down ‘from above.’”¹²

True, when bread shortages or price rises have brought rumblings from below, or even such outbreaks as those in Novocherkassk in 1962, the heirs of Stalin have been swift to meet the masses’ basic material requirements. The Kremlin knows the dangers that might result from people going angrily into the streets in bread riots. But for all practical purposes, both the struggle for power in the hierarchy and the struggle for freedom against the hierarchy seem to leave the populace cold. If anything, the common people’s anti-intellectual bias and the general chauvinism of Russian culture seem to insulate the people against the criticisms of evils in Soviet life by writers and intellectuals. How much of this indifference is simply a surface mannerism maintained in order to survive in a police state, and how much profound apathy, it is impossible to tell. One of the traditional reasons intellectuals gave for supporting the Bolsheviks—echoed in Sinyavsky’s trial testimony—was that the Bolsheviks got things accomplished despite the passivity endemic in Russia and particularly among Russia’s “tea-drinking intellectuals.” But there is also another tradition—of outbursts of mass fury whose bloodshed and cruelties have shocked the world—that characterizes Russian history. Whether such outbursts are able to overthrow a totalitarian government armed with modern weapons depends in great measure on why a popular rising would take place, under what conditions, and whether the heirs of Stalin would use all the means at their disposal to put such an insurrection down. Moreover, Amalrik pessimistically maintains, “the idea of self-government, of equality before the law and of personal freedom—and the responsibility that goes with these—are almost completely incomprehensible to the Russian people.”¹³

Most citizens in the USSR are economically better off today than they were under Stalin; they have more personal security, and are, in some measure justifiably, proud of the many Soviet *démarches* in the world arena, such as those in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Cuba and the Middle East. Both kinds of pride are elements of the Great Russian chauvinism which the Soviets have fed for their own reasons, and which is a powerful weapon against such foreign “enemies” as the United States, the entire “West,” and China, as well as against dissident elements domestically.

Again and again, those in the West who hoped that economic and cultural liberalization would lead

inevitably to greater political freedom and social justice have been disenchanted by the turn of events. The heirs of Stalin are genuinely concerned with modernizing the Soviet economic plant, but political freedom and social justice are quite another matter. Neither economic efficiency nor a rising living standard will of themselves transform the Soviet system, nor will the multifarious influences of “cultural exchange” by Western tourists, jazz, and miniskirts. As Amalrik sardonically comments, “It is possible that we will indeed have a ‘socialism’ with bare knees some day, but not one with a human face.”¹⁴

The state control of the press and publishing will continue, combined with the limitation of imports of foreign books and periodicals, with tightly controlled travel abroad for Soviet citizens and tightly controlled tourism and cultural contacts for foreigners inside the Soviet Union, so that Soviet parochialism, chauvinism, and simple ignorance will be prolonged. In the sciences, the situation will be somewhat eased in order to permit the scientific intelligentsia to “keep up” with such foreign institutions; scientists, and publications as seem necessary for the Soviet Union to keep abreast of industrial, military, and technological developments.

Most of the dissidents and liberals, if not all of them, seem to be interested not in overturning Soviet institutions but in reforming them, in imbuing them with a more humane spirit. They apparently have no desire to “return to capitalism”—if such a phrase has any meaning in the Soviet context—nor any genuine belief that such a return would be feasible even if it were desirable. What they want to create is a new socialism by making Soviet practice conform to the “socialist” promises of justice, equality, brotherhood, and civility. The dissidents all seem to retain—although a number do so for tactical purposes—that strange worship of the Bolshevik Revolution which prohibits or inhibits a rational approach to the system it has created. The attitude toward October, 1917 has taken the form of a worship of *the Revolution*, as if it were a *Ding an sich*, an icon and a force simultaneously, to be enshrined in religious awe and used with Machiavellian craft. Some of the psychology involved is revealed, albeit obliquely, by Yevtushenko:

The first mistake made by Western students of the Russian Revolution is to judge the revolutionary idea not by those who are genuinely loyal to it, but by those who betray it.

Their other mistake is that they still regard the idea of communism as something imposed by force on the Russian people, without realizing that by now it is a part of the Russian people’s flesh and blood.¹⁵

But our special Russian character must be kept in mind. Suffering is a sort of habit with us. What seems nearly unendurable to others we endure more easily. Besides, we have paid for our ideal with so much

blood and torment that the cost itself has endeared it and made it more precious to us, as a child born in pain is more precious to its mother.¹⁶

Western students of the Revolution, Yevtushenko notwithstanding, have judged the Revolution not by those who betrayed it but by those who embodied it in the institutions which have characterized Soviet society for more than half a century—and have condemned it almost unconditionally. Pasternak once, appropriately and pungently, remarked: "Men who are not free . . . always idealize their bondage."

A new "democratic movement" of sorts has emerged in the Soviet Union in the decades since Stalin's death. Numerically small, it is influential and seems (perhaps only temporarily) to have joined the leaders of political, intellectual, cultural, and scientific dissidence, though not those of religious and ethnic dissidence, into a loosely knit alliance which has several common goals—the rule of law, loosening of censorship, freedom to dissent and freedom to create, downgrading the power of the political police, freer travel and circulation of information, and equal treatment for minority nationalities. The regime could very likely crush the movement, but only at a cost it is not presently prepared to pay. It would, at the very least, lose the services of some of its most talented scientists and technicians. It is less concerned with losing the services of its most talented writers, artists, and musicians—hence the stronger measures the regime has taken with respect to them. However, even in suppressing literature, the regime's leadership cannot be altogether successful, for, as Richard Pipes has pointed out:

Soviet literature has always managed to preserve, even in the worst years of Stalinism, a modicum of autonomy. The reason for this must be sought not in Stalin's respect for literature, but in the nature of the literary vocation itself. Even when the regime prescribed for the novelist the subjects with which he was to deal and the manner in which he was to do it, it had to allow him a certain amount of latitude in executing the command. After all, if nothing else, the characters, settings and dialogues had to be invented; and where there is freedom of invention there is some freedom.

. . . The freedom of the writer is even greater when he is a poet. . . . A poet who cannot tamper with words cannot write poetry. Thus, as the novelist enjoys over the historian or sociologist some freedom of thematic invention, so the poet enjoys in addition some freedom of linguistic invention. If we consider, furthermore, that most people, censors included, do not understand poetry, we will not be surprised that even under the most inauspicious circumstances poets (and to a lesser extent novelists) possess a degree of discretion in the performance of their craft that is not granted to other groups of the intelligentsia.¹⁷

Yet there are other groups of the intelligentsia to whom the same kinds of freedom are available, particularly those in the more complex and theoretical

fields of science and economics, which is why the Party leaders are, and increasingly must be, concerned with incorporating specialists from those arcane areas into top Party counsels.* Thus, the Party leadership is probably not ready to stifle all dissent or criticism, for it must have the competent advice and cooperation of many among the intelligentsia. It probably hopes to permit the dissent as a "safety valve" and a lure, so that the intelligentsia may be persuaded that the regime will listen to its voice, not only in the areas of its expertise, but also when it attempts to achieve the rule of law and the reform of political and juridical institutions.

Underlying all the problems of the Soviet Union is the "leading role of the Party" in Soviet life. The Party is a permanent ruling elite which has arrogated to itself mythical and absolute powers of infallibility and historical destiny which no one in the Soviet Union is permitted to gainsay and no institution in the nation is permitted to contest or contradict. The Party, which means the same small group of top leaders, a group that some Soviet students have estimated to number no more than forty thousand, insists that it and only it will determine the purposes, ideals, and quality of the national life. As the Party must always be right, none of the major problems facing the USSR can be realistically confronted: not the heirs of Stalin, not fathers and sons, nor the modernization of the economy nor the liberalization of the political system nor the reformation of the judicial system. Only when the Communist Party is understood to be *not* infallible can basic reforms take place.

Few dissidents have been willing to challenge the Party's primacy head on. Usually, they have skirted the problem of the Party's monopoly of wisdom, speaking very generally of error, miscalculation, deformation, or speaking very specifically about a particular evil, such as "Lysenkoism." The blame is placed on lower echelons of the bureaucracy but never on top leaders (until after they were ousted) or on the Party as an institution. Some, like Sakharov and his colleagues, have obliquely suggested that it

* In the postwar period, Jews were gradually eliminated from important jobs in the military, intelligence, and foreign services of the Soviet Union. But keeping those areas *Judenrein* and free of dissenters has become an increasingly difficult task for the Soviet rulers because the complex technical advances in such fields as nuclear physics, space science, and computerization have made it necessary to employ technically competent people, not merely people the regime considers "politically reliable." Because so many of the most gifted scientists in physics, chemistry, advanced mathematics, and astronomy in the USSR are Jewish, there has been an ironic reversal of Party and government policy with respect to allowing Jews to enter into important military, technical, and intelligence jobs once again.

might be good to have several candidates for a single office—a beginning of what might ultimately become a multiparty system—but have always been careful to note that any reforms must be undertaken under the aegis and control of the Party. Perhaps it is impossible, in practical political terms, for dissidents thus to challenge the Party's infallibility; the dissidents are, after all, only a tiny fraction of the nation and, indeed, only a tiny fraction of the Soviet intelligentsia. They are alienated from the workers, the peasants, the military, and the government bureaucracy, so that they have neither mass base nor political leverage of great strength. The Party and its leaders are and intend to remain the sole, authoritarian, and dogmatic rulers of Russia.

By and large, those who have risen to great power in the Soviet Union have done so as the result of a bureaucratic process which winnows out great originality, intelligence, and individuality. Conformism and the stability which comes from remaining in power are their forte, not the flexibility and change which promote progress. Their system has undoubted advantages—in decisiveness, overall planning, the assignment of priorities, the ability (if not willingness) to introduce new scientific techniques, and so forth—but its viability depends on that small ruling elite at the top of the pyramid *actually being right*. When those leaders are wrong, as they have so often been, their errors are transmitted down the pyramid of power and immeasurably magnified, because there is no "negative feedback," no way of changing or modifying or opposing the "Party's will" once that will has been defined by the leadership. The system is the ideological monstrosity of "democratic centralism" in practice.

Yet the dissidents, though few in number, are a thorn in the side of the regime because they continue to insist that modernization of the nation—which the Party leaders are eager to achieve—is indissolubly tied to democratization and political reform—which the ruling elite is almost altogether against. In an age when new means of surveillance, computerized memory banks, and other powers of oppression combine to make authoritarianism technically easier, the prospects are not bright. The forces for change are not there. Even among the intellectuals, many are alienated and apathetic, desiring only to be left

alone, to be allowed to lead their private lives and follow their personal and professional inclinations without governmental interference.

What was true of Khrushchev's Russia remains true of Brezhnev's and Kosygin's. The time may yet come which many have predicted and yearned for, a time when all the great Russian gifts will be given free rein. But it will not come, until the "leading role of the Party" is permanently eliminated, until no party or person is publicly endowed with a monopoly of wisdom, righteousness, or power, until the rule of law is guaranteed in viable and responsive institutions, until the heirs of Stalin have been brought to justice and displaced from power, or have died. Until that time, the rule prevails: The foundation of the state is direction, direction.

1. Andrei Amalrik, *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 35.
2. Pasternak himself seems to have shared that "passive submissiveness to blind elemental power" that Max Hayward so astutely remarked of his creations in *Doctor Zhivago*. See Hayward's "Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*," *Encounter* (May, 1948), p. 44.
3. *L'Unità* (October 22, 1957); as quoted in Robert Conquest's *The Pasternak Affair: Courage of Genius* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1962), p. 66.
4. Peter Benno, "The Political Aspect," in *Soviet Literature in the Sixties*, Max Hayward and Edward L. Crowley, eds. (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 179.
5. *Pravda* (April 22, 1962).
6. *Pravda* (October 21, 1962); as translated in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (October 31, 1962), p. 5.
7. (New York: Dutton, 1963), p. 17.
8. "Khrushchev and the Intellectuals," *East Europe* (February, 1964), p. 13.
9. Benno, p. 184.
10. Alexander Werth, *Russia: Hopes and Fears* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p. 188.
11. *A Precocious Autobiography*, p. 89.
12. *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?*, p. 6.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
14. P. 42.
15. *A Precocious Autobiography*, p. 39.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
17. Richard Pipes, "Russia's Exigent Intellectuals," *Encounter* (January, 1964), p. 84. Pipes's is an excellent and wry essay on the traditional roles and functions, strengths and weaknesses, of the Russian intelligentsia.