No one has better credentials to make a critique of Solzhenitsyn and his book 'The Gulag Archipelago' than Roy Medvedev. Himself a courageous dissident within the Soviet Union, Medvedev is an historian and author of the book 'Let History Judge'. It was following efforts to have this work on Stalin published in the Soviet Union that Medvedev was expelled from the Communist Party in 1969. Medvedev was expelled from the Communist Party in 1969. He has been without permanent employment since 1971.

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In this article I shall try to provide an evaluation of Solzhenitsyn's new book. The assessment can only be a brief and preliminary one -- not merely because 'Gulag Archipelago' is only the first of three or four volumes of a single work, but also because even by itself it is too considerable to be adequately appraised straightaway. The book is full of frightening facts: it would be difficult to grasp even a much smaller number of them immediately. Solzhenitsyn describes in concrete detail the tragic fate of hundreds of people, destinies both extraordinary and yet typical of what has befallen us in the past decades. His book contains many reflections and observations that are profound and truthful, and others which may not be correct, but are nevertheless always born from the monstrous sufferings of millions of people, in an agony unique in the age-old history of our nation. No man who left that terrible Archipelago was the same as he who entered it, either in body and health or in ideas about life and people. I believe that no-one who has read this book will remain the same person as he was when he opened its first pages. There is nothing in Russian or world literature in this respect which I can compare with Solzhenitsyn's work.
A certain I. Soloviev has written in 'Pravda' (14/1/1974) that Solzhenitsyn's facts are unreliable, fancies of a morbid imagination or mere cynical falsifications. This, of course, is not so. I cannot agree with some of Solzhenitsyn's judgments or conclusions. But it must be firmly stated that all the main facts in his book, and especially all the details of the life and torment of those who were imprisoned, from the time of their arrest to that of their death (or in rarer cases, their release) are perfectly correct. Of course, in an 'artistic investigation' on such a huge scale, based not only on the impressions of the author himself but also on stories told (and retold) by more than two hundred former prisoners, some inaccuracies are inevitable, particularly as Solzhenitsyn had to write his book in complete secrecy, with no possibility of discussing it before publication even with many of his close friends. But the number of these errors is very small in a work of such weight. My own calculation, for example, of the scale of the deportations from Leningrad after the murder of Kirov in 1934-35 is lower than that of Solzhenitsyn. Tens of thousands of people were deported, but not actually a quarter of the population of a city of 2,000,000. Yet I do not possess exact figures either, and base myself simply on fragmentary reports and my own impressions (I have lived in Leningrad for over 15 years). It is also difficult to believe the anonymous report that Ordzhonikidze could talk to old engineers with two revolvers on his desk, at his right and left hand. To seize former officials of the Tsarist regime (not of course, all of them but mainly functionaries of the judiciary or gendarmerie), the GPU had no need to use random notes of casual informers. Lists of such officials could be found in local archives and in published reference books. In my view, Solzhenitsyn exaggerates the number of peasants deported during the years of collectivisation, which he estimates at 15 million. However, if one includes among the victims of those years peasants who died from starvation in 1932-3 (in the Ukraine alone not fewer than 3 to 4 million), it is possible to arrive at a figure even higher than that suggested by Solzhenitsyn. After Stalin's death, there were not ten but about a hundred officials of the MGB-MVD who were imprisoned or shot (in some cases without an open trial). But this was still a negligible number compared with the quantity of criminals from the 'security organs' who were left at large or even given various responsible posts. In 1936-7 Bukharin was no longer a member of the Politbureau, as Solzhenitsyn claims, but was only a candidate-member of the Central Committee.

But all these and a few other inaccuracies are insignificant within the immense artistic investigation which Solzhenitsyn has undertaken. On the other hand, there are other 'shortcomings' in the book which Solzhenitsyn himself notes in the dedication: he did not see everything, did not recollect everything, did not guess everything. He writes, for example, about the arrest of repatriated and amnestyed Cossacks in the mid-1920s. But the campaign of mass terror against the Cossacks in the Don and Ural regions during the winter and spring of 1919 was still more terrible in its consequences. This campaign lasted 'only' a little over two months, but it prolonged the Civil War with all its excesses for at least another year, providing the White Armies with dozens of new cavalry regiments. Then, too, there was the shooting of 500 hostages in Petrograd which the 'Weekly Review' of the Cheka mentions in two lines..... To describe it all, many books are still needed; and I trust that they will be written.

If 'Pravda' tried to argue that Solzhenitsyn's facts were untrue, 'Literaturnaya Gazeta' by contrast (16/1/1974) sought to persuade its readers that Solzhenitsyn's book contained nothing new. This is not true, either. Although I have been studying Stalinism for over a decade, the book told me a great deal that I had not known before. With the exception of former inmates of the camp, Soviet readers - even those who well remember the 20th and 22nd Congresses of the Party - know hardly one tenth of the facts recounted by Solzhenitsyn. Our youth, indeed, does not know even a one hundredth of them.

THE QUESTION OF VLASSOV

Many of our newspaper have written that Solzhenitsyn justifies, whitewashes, and even lauds Vlassov's Army. This is a deliberate and malignant distortion. Solzhenitsyn writes in 'Gulag Archipelago' that the Vlassovites became pitiful hirelings of the Nazis, that they 'were liable to trial for treason', that they took up the enemy's weapons and fought on the front with the despair of the doomed. Solzhenitsyn's own battery was nearly annihilated in East Prussia.
no comparative experience from which its leaders could benefit. It was impossible to weigh up every eventuality beforehand, and only then take careful decisions. Events could be predicted at most for days or weeks ahead. Fundamental decisions were made, and methods of revolutionary struggle adopted or corrected, only in the vortex of events themselves. Lenin was well aware of this, and often repeated Napoleon's maxim: 'On s'engage et puis on voit'. No revolution can be made without taking risks – risks of defeat, and risks of error. But a revolutionary party is also risking a great deal if it does not give the signal for revolution, when a revolution is possible. It is not surprising that Lenin and his government committed a series of mistakes and miscalculations. The mistakes prolonged and exacerbated the Civil War. The miscalculations initially increased the economic disarray in the country, and delayed the transition to NEP. Lenin's hopes of an imminent European revolution that would come to the technical and cultural aid of Russia did not materialise. The Soviet government went too far in restricting democracy in our country.

The list of such errors and miscalculations could be extended. But no cybernetics will ever be able to prove that the armed uprising of 24 October 1917 was historically a premature action, and that all the future misdeeds of Stalin's regime followed from this fatal mistake by Lenin. For after Lenin's death the party still had to choose paths explored by no predecessor. Unfortunately, those who succeeded Lenin at the head of the party did not possess his wisdom, his knowledge, or his ability usually to find the right solutions for difficult situations. They did not make even minimal use of the opportunities which the October Revolution had created for a rapid advance towards a genuinely socialist and democratic society. Today we still remain far from that objective. Stalin not only did not 'follow exactly where footsteps made before him led'. Such footsteps do not exist in history. In fact, Stalin swiftly rejected the few guidelines left by Lenin in his last writings.

In conditions of Revolution and Civil War, no government can dispense with forms of violence. But even the most objective historian would have to say that already in the first years of Soviet power the reasonable limits of such violence were frequently overstepped. From the summer of 1918, a wave of both White and Red terror broke over our country. A great many of these acts of mass violence were quite unnecessary and harmful to the logic and interest of the class struggle itself. Such terror merely brutalised both sides, prolonged the war and generated further superfluous violence. It is unfortunately true that in the early years of the Revolution, Lenin too used the verb 'shoot' much more often than existing circumstances demanded. Solzhenitsyn cites Lenin, without actually distorting his words, but always with a disobliging comment. Nevertheless, would anyone today approve, for example, of the following order sent in August 1918 by Lenin to G. Fedorov, head of the local Soviet in the province of Nizhni Novgorod: 'No efforts to be spared; mass terror to be introduced, hundreds of prostitutes who have intoxicated our soldiers, and former officers, etc., to be shot and deported'.

Deport – yes, but why kill women?

Such abuses of power must be regretted and condemned. Yet the terror of the Civil War did not pre-determine the fearful terror of the Stalinist epoch. Lenin made not a few mistakes, many of which he admitted himself. There is no doubt that an honest historian must take note of his errors and abuses of power. However, we remain convinced that the overall balance sheet of Lenin's activity was positive. Solzhenitsyn thinks otherwise. That is his right. In a socialist country, every citizen should be able to express his opinions and judgments on the activity of any political leader.

THE EXAMPLE OF KRYLENKO

In his book Solzhenitsyn does not spare any of the revolutionary parties in Russia. The SR's (Socialist-Revolutionaries) were terrorists and babblers, 'with no worthy leaders'. The Mensheviks were naturally only babblers. But it is the Bolsheviks whom Solzhenitsyn condemns most fiercely; although they were able to seize and hold power in Russia, in doing so they gave proof of excessive and needless cruelty. Among the Bolshevik leaders, Solzhenitsyn singles out in particular N.V. Krylenko, the Chairman of the Supreme Revolutionary Tribunal and Procurator of the Republic, the chief prosecutor in the 'show' trials of the first years of the Soviet regime. Solzhenitsyn devotes nearly two whole chapters to these trials ('The Law – a Child', 'The Law Matures'). Krylenko's name also makes a frequent appearance in other chapters.
General Steiner -- this episode is an indisputable historical fact. Nearly all the ‘Vlassovites’ were sentenced to 25 years’ imprisonment. They never received any amnesty and virtually all of them perished in captivity and exile in the North. I share the view that this was too harsh a penalty for most of them. For Stalin was far more guilty than anyone else in this tragedy.

Solzhenitsyn has been accused of minimising the evil of Nazism and the cruelty of Russian Tsarism. It was not Solzhenitsyn’s task to provide an account of the ‘German Archipelago’, although he frequently cites Gestapo tortures and the inhuman treatment of Russian prisoners of war by the fascists. But Solzhenitsyn does not depart from the truth, when he writes that Stalin unleashed mass repressions, deported millions of people, used torture and fabricated trials long before Hitler came to power. Moreover all this continued in our country many years after the defeat of German fascism.

Naturally, in this respect the Russian Tsars could hardly equal Stalin. Solzhenitsyn tells us a great deal about ‘Tsarist prison and exile in his work, as this was a frequent topic of conversation among the prisoners, especially if there was an Old Bolshevik among them (prisoners belonging to the other socialist parties had nearly all died before the war). In such talks, prison and exile in the ‘ancien regime’ seemed like a rest-home to those who were in camps in the 1940s. As for the scale of repression ..... In 1937-8 Stalin’s apparatus shot or starved to death in camps and prisons as many workers, peasants and artisans in the course of a single day, as Tsarist executioners killed in a year at the time of the 1905 revolution and the reaction which followed it. There is simply no comparison.

I suspect that different readers will find that different chapters of Solzhenitsyn’s book make the most powerful impression on them. For me the most important were ‘Blue Edgings’ (Chapter Four) and ‘The Supreme Penalty’ (Chapter Eleven). In these the author achieves an exceptional depth of psychological insight into the behaviour of prison guards and their victims. Solzhenitsyn is profiler here than Dostoyevsky. I do not mean by this that Solzhenitsyn is a greater artist than Dostoyevsky. I am not a specialist on literature. But it is clear that the Stalinist prisons, camps, transit centres and exile that Solzhenitsyn traversed a hundred years after the arrest and exile of Dostoyevsky, gave him ten times as many opportunities for study of the various forms of human evil as the author of ‘The House of the Dead’. There is no doubt that Solzhenitsyn has acquitted himself of this task as only a great writer would.

‘Gulag Archipelago’ contains many penetrating and accurate, although incidental, remarks about Stalin’s personality. Solzhenitsyn considers, however, that Stalin’s personal role in the historical catastrophe which struck our country, and even in the creation of the Archipelago, was so unimportant that many of these remarks are dropped outside the main text, relegated to parentheses and footnotes. Thus in the footnote on the penultimate page of the book, we read: ‘Both before and during my time in prison, I too used to believe that Stalin was responsible for the disastrous course taken by the Soviet State. Then Stalin died peacefully – and has the direction of the ship changed in the least? His own personal imprint on events was merely a dreary stupidity, an obtuse vanity. For the rest, he simply followed where footsteps made before him’.

Solzhenitsyn treats only very briefly in his second chapter the repressions of 1937-8 (why give details of ‘what has already been widely described and will frequently be repeated again?’) when the core of the party leadership, intelligentsia, officers and commissars of the Red Army, and the majority of prominent economic administrators and Komsomol leaders, were liquidated in the cellars of the NKVD, and when the top State leadership together with senior ranks of the security apparatus, the diplomatic service, and so on, were violently reshuffled. Solzhenitsyn comments, again in a footnote: ‘Today the evidence of the Cultural Revolution in China (also 17 years after final victory), suggests in all probability the operation here of a general law of history. Even Stalin himself now begins to seem a mere blind and superficial instrument of it’.

It is difficult to agree with such a view of Stalin’s role and importance in the tragedy of the thirties. It would, of course, be a mistake to separate the epoch of Stalinist terror completely from the revolutionary period that preceded it. There was no such precise or absolute boundary line either in 1937 as many believe, or in 1934 as Khrushchev main-
tained, or in 1929 as Solzhenitsyn himself once thought, or in 1924, when Lenin died and the Trotskyist Opposition was broken up, or in 1922 when Stalin became the General Secretary of the Party. Yet all these years, and also others, marked political turning points that were extremely real and demand special analysis.

Obviously, there exists a continuity between the party which took power in October 1917 and that which governed the USSR in 1937, in 1947, in 1957, and in 1967 when Solzhenitsyn was completing ‘Gulag Archipelago’. But this continuity is not synonymous with identity. Stalin did not always follow in ‘footsteps made before him’. In the first years of the revolution he certainly did not always follow in Lenin’s footsteps; in fact, even then, with every step he led the party in another direction. Outer similarities marked very great inner divergences, and in some cases even polar opposites; and the road to these was in no way predetermined by an inevitable law of history. A deeper and more scientific analysis of the events discussed by Solzhenitsyn in his artistic investigation, will in the future incontrovertibly show that even within the framework of the relations between Party, State, and society created in Russia under Lenin, Stalin effected sharp turns and fundamental reversals, merely preserving the outward shell of so-called Leninist norms and the official vocabulary of Marxism-Leninism. Stalinism was in many respects the negation and bloody annihilation of Bolshevism and of all revolutionary forces in Russia: it was in a determinate sense a genuine counter-revolution. Of course, this does not mean that the Leninist period and heritage in the history of the Russian Revolution should be exempted from the most serious critical analysis.

Paradoxically, however, without ever really speaking of Stalinism and even purporting to deny its legitimacy as a concept, Solzhenitsyn’s artistic investigation of one of the main sectors of the Stalinist regime, helps us to comprehend the whole criminal inhumanity of Stalinism as a system. Solzhenitsyn is not correct when he contends that this system has essentially survived to this day; but neither has it disappeared completely from our social, political, and cultural life. Solzhenitsyn has dealt a very heavy blow to Stalinism and neo-Stalinism with this book. None of us has done more in this respect than Solzhenitsyn.

SOLZHENITSYN AND LENIN

Even when he was a Komsomol, Solzhenitsyn had his doubts about the wisdom and honesty of Stalin. It was precisely these misgivings, expressed in one of his letters from the front, that led to his arrest and conviction. But at that time he still never doubted that ‘the great October Revolution was splendid and just, a victorious accomplishment of men animated by high purpose and self-sacrifice’. Today, Solzhenitsyn thinks otherwise, both about the October Revolution and about Lenin.

Here we shall deal with only two accusations, from among the great number that Solzhenitsyn now levels directly or indirectly against Lenin. Solzhenitsyn contends that in 1917 Lenin was determined to bring about a classless society in Russia through a new ‘proletarian and socialist’ revolution, although neither Russia nor the Russian people needed such a revolution, or were ready for it. He also maintains that Lenin misused terrorist methods of struggle against his political opponents. It is, of course, easy to point to mistakes made by a revolutionary 50 years after the event. But the first socialist revolution was inevitably a leap into the unknown. There was no precedent for it,
by Vlassovite fire. But Solzhenitsyn does not simplify the problem of Vlassov’s troops and of similar formations in the fascist army.

Among the multiple waves of Stalinist repression, there were for many of us one that constituted our own special tragedy. For Tvardovsky, for instance, this was the destruction of the kulaks. His father, a poor and conscientious peasant, a former soldier in the Red Army, a defender of Soviet power, fell victim to it. He was deported to the Urals with his whole family. Only an accident saved his son: by that time he was already studying in an urban centre. This son was to become our great poet. But at that time Tvardovsky had to disown his father. He was to write about all this in his last poem ‘In the Name of Memory’.

For my own family, it was the repressions of 1937-8 that brought tragedy upon us, for the purges of those years struck especially at the commanders and commissars of the Red Army. My father, a divisional commander and lecturer at the Military Political Academy, was among those who were arrested and perished. Men like him were utterly devoted to the Soviet State, to the Bolshevik Party and to Socialism. They were romantic heroes to me as veterans of the Civil War, and I never believed that they were ‘enemies of the people’.

For Solzhenitsyn, it was not his own arrest that was a profound personal tragedy, but the cruel and terrible fate of the millions of Soviet prisoners of war, his contemporaries, sons of October, who had in June 1941 formed a substantial part of the cadres of our army. This army was routed and surrounded in the first days and weeks of the war because of Stalin’s criminal miscalculations, his inability to prepare either the army or the country for war, his desertion of his post in the first week of war, and his prior destruction of experienced commanders and commissars of whom there was now an acute shortage. About 3,000,000 soldiers and officers were taken prisoner in this debacle, and a further 1,000,000 subsequently captured in the ‘pincers’ at Vyazma, Kharkov, on the Kerch Peninsula and near Volkhov. Stalin’s regime then betrayed these soldiers a second time by refusing to sign the international prisoners-of-war convention, depriving them of all Red Cross aid and condemning them to starvation in German concentration camps. Finally, Stalin once again betrayed those who survived; after victory, nearly all of them were arrested and sent to swell the population of Gulag Archipelago. Solzhenitsyn considers this terrible treason to its own troops to be the most odious single crime committed by the Stalinist regime – one unknown in the millennial annals of our nation. ‘It felt’, writes Solzhenitsyn, ‘that the story of these millions of Russian prisoners would transfix me for ever, like a pin through a beetle’.

Hardly one tenth of our prisoners joined Vlassov units, police sections, labor battalions, or ‘volunteered’ for auxiliary brigades of the Wehrmacht. Most of those who did, genuinely hoped to acquire food and clothing and then go over to the Soviet army or join the partisans. Such hopes soon proved illusory: the opportunities for crossing the lines were too small.

Solzhenitsyn does not justify and does not exalt these desperate and luckless men. But he pleads before the court of posterity the circumstances mitigating their responsibility. These youngsters were often not quite literate; the majority of them were peasants demoralised by the defeat; in captivity they were told that Stalin had disowned and vituperated them; they found that this was true; and they knew that what awaited them was hunger and death in German camps.

Of course, it is not possible to assent to everything Solzhenitsyn says. For example, I feel no sympathy for a certain Yuri E. -- a Soviet officer who consciously and without the compulsion of hunger went over to the Nazis and became a German officer in charge of an Intelligence training centre. From Solzhenitsyn’s account, it is clear that this man returned to the Soviet Army only because of the complete rout of the Germans and not because he was drawn to his homeland; he banked on revealing ‘German secrets’, in other words securing a transfer from the German Intelligence to the Soviet MGB. The same figure was apparently also convinced that a new war between the USSR and the Allies would soon break out after the defeat of Germany, in which the Red Army would be swiftly defeated.

As for the violent battle which was fought near Prague between major Vlassovite units and German troops commanded by the SS
Of course, it can be pointed out that the first years of Soviet power were the time of the most desperate struggle of the Soviet Republic for its very survival. If Revolution and Soviet power were necessary, then they had to be defended against numerous and merciless foes; and this could not have been accomplished without revolutionary-military tribunals and the Cheka. But even bearing all this in mind, it is impossible to shut one’s eyes to the fact that many of the sentences meted out in ‘court’ and out of court were unjust or senselessly brutal, and that many extraneous, stupid and mal­evolent elements were active in the Cheka and in the tribunals. Krylenko soon became one of the main ‘directors’ of this repression, playing a role similar to that of the Jacobin tribune Couthon, who sent to the guillotine not only Royalists, but also simple old women of 70 and young girls of 18, revolutionaries discontented with Robespierre, and the eminent chemist Lavoisier (who requested time to complete an important series of experiments before his execution - ‘We do not need scientists’, replied Couthon).

Of course, Krylenko was not an isolated exception within the ranks of the Bolsheviks. But neither were all the leaders of that party like him. Unfortunately, however, it is not only the most honest and courageous men of their time who become revolutionaries. A revolution, especially during its ascent, also attracts people who are resentful, vain, ambitious, self-seeking, men of cold hearts and unclean hands, as well as many stupid and obtuse fanatics capable of anything. But all this is no reason to condemn every revolution and every revolutionary.

Something else has also to be considered. For the Russian revolutionaries, their greatest test proved to be neither imprisonment nor exile in Siberia, neither reckless attack under fire from White Guards’ machine-guns, nor hunger and cold, but power and especially the practically unlimited power of the first phase of the Soviet regime. It has long been known that power corrupts and depraves even some of the best of men. It must be admitted with sadness that very many Bolsheviks did not withstand the ordeal of power. Long before their own destruction in the grinding machine of Stalinist persecutions, the same people participated in many acts of cruel repression against others, which in most cases were unjust, gratuitous and harmful. But it in no way follows from this that these Bolsheviks were equally unjust or cruel, or insensitive to human suffering, before the Revolution – indeed that they had not been inspired by the best of motives and by the highest of aims and ideals.

Solzhenitsyn understands the corrupting influence of power. He describes with utter candour how, after a hard and hungry year as an ordinary private, deadened by drill and discipline, bullied by stripling officers, he forgot all this completely the moment he himself became a lieutenant and then a captain. He started to develop a deep mental gulf between himself and his subordinates; he understood less and less the heavy burdens of existence on the front; he saw himself more and more as a man of a different kind and caste. Without giving it a second thought, he availed himself of all the privileges accorded to officers, arrogantly addressed old and young alike, harassed his orderly, and was sometimes so harsh to his men that on one occasion an old colonel had to rebuke him during an inspection. Solzhenitsyn confesses: ‘From the officer’s epaulettes that decorated my shoulders for a mere two years, a poisonous golden dust filtered into the void between my ribs’. Moreover, Solzhenitsyn nearly became an officer in the NKVD itself: attempts were made to persuade him to enter the NKVD school and had further pressure been applied, he would have consented. Recalling his career as an officer, he makes the merciless admission: ‘I thought of myself as a selfless and disinterested person. Yet I had meanwhile become a ready-made hangman. Had I gone to school in the NKVD under Yezhov, I would have been fully-fledged under Beria’.

If Solzhenitsyn changed so much during his two years as a junior officer, then what is likely to have happened to Krylenko – who in an even shorter period of time rose, so to speak, from ensign to supreme command in the Russian army and then became President of the Supreme Revolutionary Tribunal, Deputy Commissar for Justice and Chief Procurator of the RSFSR? Although Krylenko had finished two academic courses before the Revolution, so much accumulated power made him drunk and stupid beyond recognition.

‘It seems’, Solzhenitsyn writes, ‘that evil has its own threshold of magnitude too. A man may balance and toss between good and
evil all his life, slip down, let go, lift himself up again, repent, then fall into darkness once more -- but as long as he has not crossed a critical threshold of evil, he may yet redeem himself, there is still hope for him. But when the baseness of his misdeeds or the absolute-ness of his power reaches a certain point, he suddenly crosses that threshold, and then he abandons humanity. Perhaps then -- there is no return'.

'Let the reader who expects to find a political indictment here, close this book', writes Solzhenitsyn elsewhere. 'Oh, if everything were so simple! -- if somewhere there were dark men cunningly plotting dark deeds, and it were enough to uncover and destroy them. But the line that divides good from evil runs through every man's heart; and who would destroy part of his own heart? .... In the lifetime of one heart this line is always moving, now compressed by triumphant evil, now yielding space to awakening goodness. The very same man at different ages, in different situations, of his life is often a wholly different person.

At one moment, he may be near diabolic; at another near saintly. But his name does not change, and we attribute all his actions alike to it.' In this profound remark, we can perceive at least part of the explanation for the drama and fall of very many Bolsheviks, who were by no means the smallest of cogs in the early machinery of arbitrary rule, before they themselves became victims of Stalinist terror.

SOLZHENITSYN'S OWN PROPOSALS

But if power corrupts and depraves men, if politics is, as Solzhenitsyn believes, 'not even a form of science -- but an empirical field, which cannot be defined by mathematical formula, subject to human egoism and blind passion', if all professional politicians are no more than 'carbuncles on the neck of society preventing the free movement of its head and arms', then what should we strive for, how can we build a just human community?

Solzhenitsyn deals with these questions only incidentally, in parenthetic remarks, which are not explained or developed in detail. But it is clear from these brief comments that Solzhenitsyn considers the justest form of society to be one 'headed by people who are capable of rationally directing its activities'. For Solzhenitsyn, such people are in the first instance technicians and scientists (workers, in Solzhenitsyn's view, only as assistants to technicians in industry). But who would assume the moral leadership of such a society? His reflections make it clear that for him it is not a political doctrine, but only religion that can fulfill this moral function. Belief in God is the sole moral bulwark of humanity, and deeply religious people alone bore well -- better than all others -- the sufferings of Stalin's camps and prisons.

But such thoughts are a surrender to Utopia, and they are not even very original. Solzhenitsyn hits out violently against every sort of political falsehood. He rightly calls on Soviet people, and above all on Soviet youth, not to assist or collude with lies. But it is not enough only to convince people of the falsity of this or that political doctrine; it is also necessary to show them the truth elsewhere and to convince them of its real value. However, for the overwhelming majority of the Soviet population, religion does not and cannot any longer represent such a truth. The youth of this century are scarcely likely to be guided by faith in God. Indeed, without politics and political struggle, how could engineers and scientists ever undertake to direct the affairs of a society or its economy? Moreover, even if they succeeded, what would prevent such a society from becoming a dictatorship of technocrats? If religion were to gain moral dominance of society once more, would this not eventually reproduce the worst forms of theocracy?

Referring to the repressions of 1937, Solzhenitsyn writes: 'Perhaps 1937 was necessary, to prove how worthless was the world outlook, which they vaunted, while they tore Russia asunder, destroying her bulwarks and trampling her shrines'. Solzhenitsyn's allusions, as may readily be guessed, is to Marxism. But here he is mistaken. It was not Marxism that was responsible for the perversions of Stalinism, and the supersession of Stalinism will in no way mean the collapse of Marxism, or of scientific socialism. Solzhenitsyn is well aware of the fact, which he mentions on another page, that the two-hundred-year-old savagery of the Inquisition, with its burning and torturing of heretics, was eventually mitigated by, among other things, religious ideology itself.

To me, at any rate, Solzhenitsyn's ideals have very little appeal. I remain deeply con-
vinced that in the foreseeable future our society will have to be based on the unity of socialism and democracy, and that it is precisely the development of Marxism and scientific communism that alone can permit the creation of a just human community.

Technicians and researchers should have a greater say in our society than they enjoy today. But this in no way precludes a scientifically organised political system. Such a system would involve, in particular, abolition of all privileges for public leaders, a rational limitation of political power, self-administration wherever possible, increased jurisdiction for local authorities, separation of legislative executive and judicial powers, restriction of incumbency of political positions to limited periods of time, full freedom of thought and expression (including, of course, religious conviction and practice), liberty of organisation and assembly for representatives of all political currents, free elections and equal rights to put forward candidates for all political groups and parties, and so on. Only such a society, free from the exploitation of man by man and based on common ownership of the means of production, can ensure an unimpeded and comprehensive progress of all mankind, as well as of every individual.

So long as we have not achieved full socialist democracy in the USSR, the development of our country will continue to remain slow, partial and deformed, and spiritual giants like Solzhenitsyn will be rare. Before his arrest, Solzhenitsyn considered himself a Marxist. After the terrible experiences described with such implacable truth in ‘Gulag Archipelago’, Solzhenitsyn lost belief in Marxism. This is a matter of his conscience and his conviction. Every sincere change of belief deserves respect and understanding. Solzhenitsyn did not deceive or betray anybody. Today he is an opponent of Marxism, and does not hide the fact.

Marxism will not, of course, collapse through the loss of one of its former adherents. We believe, on the contrary, Marxism can only benefit from polemical debate with an opponent like Solzhenitsyn. It is obviously far better for Marxism to have adversaries like Solzhenitsyn than ‘defenders’ like Mikhalkov or Chakovsky.* A ‘scientific’ ideology which has to be imposed on people by sheer force or the threat of force is worthless. Fortunately, genuine scientific socialism has no need of such methods.

* Sergei Mikhalkov and Alexander Chakovsky: leading functionaries of the Soviet Writers’ Union.