

## correspondence

### "THE SOLZHENITSYN AFFAIR"

Eugene, Ore.

Dear Sir: Paul W. Blackstock's article, "The Solzhenitsyn Affair: A Minority View" (*worldview*, November, 1970) raises many more questions than it attempts to answer, including a number that *worldview* has never aired and that perhaps many of its readers and contributors would as soon not face. I cannot evade the responsibility of at least attempting to bring them out here.

The first half of Blackstock's article briefly reviews the Solzhenitsyn affair, acknowledging Solzhenitsyn's greatness with strained reluctance, speaking of his anti-Stalinism as an "obsession," and calling the effect of his writing "hallucinogenic" in that "only the past seems real and the present a dream."

The second half of the article is in effect a call to action: Blackstock informs his readers that "the effort must be made" to divest "the man in the street" of "cold-war stereotypes" and "the worst possible" image of the USSR, which are perniciously reinforced in the Western reader by Solzhenitsyn's novels about Stalin's time. In place of this "worst possible image," we are to accept and promote the "growing consensus among such 'revisionist' Soviet experts as William Mandel, Peter Viereck and Richard Lowenthal that the present Soviet regime is . . . post-totalitarian"; the remainder of the article casts about for evidence in support of the feeling that a more liberal attitude toward literary protests will be adopted in the future, to match the progress of the USSR in science and technology.

One hardly knows where to begin to respond.

In the first place, Blackstock has carefully chosen his gallery of "Soviet experts." Mandel, for example, has been turning out academic whitewashes of the USSR for decades, spiced with just enough criticism to give the appearance of objectivity without the substance. . . . It is hard to detect any change of approach between his *Guide to the Soviet Union of 1949* (still well within the Stalin era), in which he devoted some pages to the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states without ever mentioning the mass murders and deportations and the guerrilla wars of resistance that were still going on, and the second edition of his *Russia Re-Examined* (1968), where he has to acknowledge some of the facts that have become better known since, but cleverly words his account to give the impression that all of that is past, and quotes all sorts of persons to the effect that everything is fine now (Mandel characteristically prefers quoting the prevarications of others to making a statement on his own authority). Blackstock's authorities are "hallucinogenic," not in the sense that they make the past live but in the sense that they are determined to present "the best possible image" of the USSR, which happens to be even farther from Soviet realities than the "worst possible image" of "cold war stereotypes."

One wonders whether the attitude of the public is

more determined by cold war stereotypes or by the revisionist stereotypes so often presented in news media. Renewed oppression of tens of millions of members of religious communities is now documented as a major development of the past twelve years or so by a number of admirable books. How much of this does the man in the street know? How much do the readers of *worldview* know? Imagine the reaction of *worldview*, or *Christianity and Crisis* or *Christian Century*, if waves of arrests, secret trials, etc. comparable to those that took place in the USSR in the sixties, were to occur in Spain. (I do not include the Jewish press because, in sharp contrast to the Christian press, it has recognized its responsibility to Soviet Jewry and shows some signs of recognizing a responsibility to all the religious and national communities now threatened by Soviet cultural genocide; I doubt that any responsible Jewish journal would have published Mr. Blackstock's piece.) Compare their attitude toward torture in Brazil and Greece with their attitude toward the *present* (not back in Stalin's days) conditions in Soviet concentration camps, as detailed in A. Marchenko's *My Testimony* (1969), hardly differing from those described by Solzhenitsyn except in the reduction of the total number of prisoners. If 85-year-old Fricis Mendels had been sentenced to five years' imprisonment for the crime of giving an American historian documents pertaining to events of 1905 by South Africa, can anyone doubt that these journals would have made an issue of it? Mendels has the misfortune of being a Latvian; "Judeo-Christian ethics" applies in the Third World, not in Latvia. If Simas Kudirka had been beaten senseless and returned to Portuguese authorities, would the progressive Christian press have been so silent?

If I had to generalize, I would say that among university students what is influential is not cold war stereotypes but the theory that cold war stereotypes dominate almost everyone's image of the USSR and that all serious evils there died with Stalin. If an effort is going to be made to correct stereotypes, it must be based on truth, not on "worst" or "best possible images," not on Fred Schwarz or William Mandel, not on the *Dan Smoot Report* or the *New World Review*. The truth is much less pretty than Mr. Blackstock seems to think, and it imposes responsibilities to very large numbers of real oppressed persons which, so far, our experts on religion and international affairs have refused to acknowledge. . . .

Stephen C. Reynolds

The Author Replies:

It was not by accident that my article on the Solzhenitsyn Affair was subtitled "A Minority View," and a critical reaction from some readers was expected. . . .

With respect to the comments of Stephen Reynolds, I am baffled by his charge that I have acknowledged Solzhenitsyn's greatness only "with strained reluctance." As one of the first Americans to read Solzhenitsyn in *Novy Mir* and to translate his two early novellas, An

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