

that the President was aware of the coverup prior to March 21, when he himself claims first to have heard of it. That all of this does not represent a new White House view is suggested by the fact that the President himself said last summer that the tapes could be "misinterpreted." Such persistence of apprehension may suggest that the White House never in fact intended to disclose the contents of the tapes.

The timing of the announcement, however, is not uninteresting. It came during the Christmas season and coincided with Nixon's carefully staged trip to California on a commercial airliner. One reading of this concatenation of events is that Nixon is in effect pleading *nolo* on the coverup. The most plausible inference is that the tapes, while not containing hard evidence of Nixon's involvement in the criminal obstruction of justice, do contain material that could be "misinterpreted" as suggesting that he was aware of it. The Christmas season timing of the announcement of what was probably intended all along takes advantage of the traditional season of good cheer. The trip in the airliner removed Nixon from his semi-regal trappings and made him temporarily "one of us," i.e., not perfect. This series of Nixonian gestures could therefore be translated as follows: "Okay, I had some involvement. Everybody believes I did anyway—and as a matter of fact, they are right. There are some fishy things on the tapes. But nothing that would give grounds for my indictment—notice that the prosecutor has the tapes. Hell, it's Christmas and we all make mistakes, so how about letting me off the hook?"

Solzhenitsyn: Man of the Year

With the publication in Paris of *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's struggle with the Soviet system reaches a climax of almost unbearable intensity. On the one side is this great writer, armed with his genius, a kind of colleague of Tolstoy, and also with his religious faith, his integrity, and his astounding courage. Arrayed against him is the entire Soviet totalitarian-imperial system, from Mr. Brezhnev on down: the secret police, the bureaucrats, the Party organization and the Writers' Union, the censors, jailers, and torturers, the admirals, generals, and border guards, Smersh, the Soviet delegates to the Committee on Human Rights, the editors of *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. The remarkable thing is that against these odds Solzhenitsyn is not only holding his own, surviving, being heard, but perhaps winning. *The Gulag Archipelago* is a stunning political act. It will not bring down the totalitarian structure, but it does damage it, and the damage is of a sort that cannot easily be repaired.

The book consists, in its brilliant foreground at least, of a detailed and devastating account of Soviet police terror and the bestiality of the prison camp system during the period 1918-1956, including an account of Solzhenitsyn's experiences during his own 11-year sentence to the camps. The "archipelago" of the title refers to the police

system, a state within the larger state, islands of concentrated terror, yet, and this is Solzhenitsyn's point, reflecting the true essence of the larger state itself. Here is life within the archipelago:

Sukhanovka was the most terrible prison the MGB had. They used it to terrify prisoners; and interrogators hissed out its name ominously. Those who had been there weren't subject to further interrogations: they were either insane and talking only disconnected nonsense, or else they were dead.

But here is life "outside" the archipelago:

As Tanya Khodekevich wrote: "You can pray freely/But just so only God can hear." And for these verses she received a sentence of ten years.

Or:

You are arrested by a religious pilgrim who has stayed "for the sake of Christ" with you overnight. You are arrested by a meterman who has come to read your electric meter. You are arrested by a bicyclist who has run into you on the street, by a railway conductor, a taxi driver, a savings bank employee, a cinema theater administrator. Any one of them can arrest you, and you notice the concealed maroon-colored identification only when it is too late.

The archipelago is a state within a state, yes, but also a totalitarian prison inside a larger totalitarian prison.

Ever since the supposed end of the cold war, it has been fashionable to pooh-pooh the concept of totalitarianism as developed earlier by Hannah Arendt and others. Solzhenitsyn returns us to it with a vengeance. Here before our eyes is the thing itself. As Arendt wrote: "The concentration and extermination camps of totalitarian regimes serve as the laboratories in which the fundamental belief of totalitarianism that everything is possible is verified . . . the means of total domination are not only more drastic but . . . totalitarianism differs essentially from other forms of political oppression known to us such as despotism, tyranny, and dictatorship. Wherever it rose to power, it developed entirely new political institutions and destroyed all social, legal, and political traditions of the country." Solzhenitsyn's book, however, is a political bombshell because it is not only, or even centrally, about the *past*, about "Stalinism" as distinguished from "Brezhnevism" or some other later mutant. Solzhenitsyn's voice sounds from inside the whale. His point is that the police system remains the central institution of the Soviet state, that the system of repression is structurally inseparable from the Soviet system itself.

The publication of the book constitutes an act dramatizing that truth. The manuscript was completed some years ago. Last August, the police arrested a woman who had a secret copy and subjected her to a lengthy and brutal interrogation. When she was released, she hanged herself. Solzhenitsyn reasoned that since the police had a copy anyway, he might as well publish the book—in Paris. Some thaw.

It is part of the supreme drama of these circumstances that the entire tyrannical system cannot now defeat him. It can arrest him, and by so doing prove his point. It can put him in a "sanatorium." It can torture him and even kill him. But any option it chooses can only further dramatize its true nature. Solzhenitsyn has struck a blow that the totalitarians cannot really parry.

One further quotation from *The Gulag Archipelago* cannot be omitted here: "In their own countries Roosevelt and Churchill are honored as examples of statesmanlike wisdom. To us, in Russian prison discussions, their systematic shortsightedness and stupidity stood out as astonishingly obvious. How could they, in their descent from 1941 to 1945, fail to secure any guarantees whatsoever of the independence of Eastern Europe? How could they, for the laughable toy of a four-zone Berlin, their own future Achilles' heel, give away broad regions of Saxony and Thuringia? And what military or political sense was there in the surrender by them, to death at Stalin's hands, of several hundreds of thousands of armed Soviet citizens determined not to surrender?"

Again, the analytical double focus. That is about 1945, but also about 1974. Solzhenitsyn is the man of the year, the man of any year.

Unrealpolitik of Father Dan

The world is used to hearing Daniel Berrigan denounce the U.S. as a "fascist superpower." It was not prepared for his recent denunciation of Israel as "a criminal Jewish community." Many, especially Jews, construed his remarks as antisemitic; and a peace organization called Promoting Enduring Peace, which had planned to give him its Gandhi Award, considered canceling the scheduled presentation (he resolved the matter by refusing it). But Berrigan is no Jew-baiter; on the contrary. His outburst requires a different type of explanation than mere hostility to Israel, or to Jews in general; for it was of a piece with his tirades against America.

It is important to note the terms of his charges. Israel's historic mission, he said, has been essentially prophetic: to "judge the nations," in the Biblical phrase. But she "has veered off into imperial misadventure," and "is rapidly evolving into the image of her ancient adversaries." This is a favorite theme of Berrigan's: when we meet force with force, we descend to the level of our enemies and become their "mirror image."

The idea appeals aesthetically and has a certain moral plausibility. Christians, after all, are commanded to "resist not evil," and they have the supreme warrant of their Savior's example. But there are difficulties. Leave aside practical and strategic ones for the moment (is the cop who resorts to force the "mirror image" of the robber? Is Israel's annexation of the Sinai best understood as imperialism, or as a way of ensuring its own safety?). Even if Israel were a Christian nation, it would still be

madness to hold a whole nation to the highest standards of individual conduct—not because men can never live up to them en masse, but because those standards simply don't make sense when applied that way. A man may renounce his own rights, even his life, for the sake of a greater good; he may not renounce the rights and lives of others for whom he is responsible—his wife, his children, or, if he is a statesman, his countrymen. Thomas Aquinas faces the problem with incisive wisdom: "Precepts of this kind . . . should always be borne in readiness of mind, so that we be ready to obey them, and, *if necessary*, to refrain from resistance or self-defense. Nevertheless it is necessary sometimes for a man to act otherwise *for the common good, or for the good of those with whom he is fighting.*"

Aquinas' emphasis, as the late Willmoore Kendall pointed out, is on the real good achieved by the decision whether to resist violence—not on legalistic adherence to an abstract rule, least of all when such adherence is thought of as a means of "acquiring" grace for oneself. One senses that spiritual narcissism, as Walter Berns remarked in these pages [*NR*, Nov. 9], in Berrigan's rather priggish way of speaking of "my conscience," "my essential soul," and in his writing books and plays to dramatize his own moral heroism.

The application of this disposition to international affairs, writes the British political scientist Kenneth Minogue, may be termed "moral nationalism," which "has been summed up in the conviction that 'our country's role is to be exemplary rather than powerful.'" This is exactly Berrigan's program for America, and for Israel, and even for (North) Vietnam, which he understands to be trying to build "a decent society": self-determination, and fastidious secession from the dirty realm of power politics, each country embodying socialist virtue in itself, and serving as a moral beacon to its neighbors. "Like many moral movements," Minogue continues, "this one involves a withdrawal into inner moral certainties, with a consequent refusal to take external events seriously. . . . Moral nationalism is thus one more maneuver in the long tradition of devices which are thought to do away with politics, seen as the selfish exercise of power." He concludes: "It is simply not a possible way of carrying on in the world."

Notes



Asides

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