

Correspondence

Solzhenitsyn

To the Editors: William C. Fletcher's "The Dissent of Solzhenitsyn" (August, 1972) does indeed present, as he claims, the prospect of a breath-taking change in the Soviet Union. There is no doubt that the merger of religious and secular dissent would present a new and formidable challenge to the Party's present control. At the same time, however, one misses in Fletcher's analysis any serious consideration of what comes after "liberalization." The same criticism, not so incidentally, must be raised with respect to Abraham Rothberg's "Writers Under the Heirs of Stalin" in your February issue. Each of these authors deplores, as any decent man must, the continuing repression of dissent; both seem guilty of viewing dissent as a political end in itself. To be sure, those of us who may long ago have viewed the Soviet Union as a promising experiment in socialism have many reasons for disillusionment. Yet the present Soviet leadership has no choice but to try to envision a future that does not simply repudiate the past. Fletcher's apparently uncritical affirmation of religious dissent, on the other hand, seems to invite nothing more than such a repudiation.

Does he really mean to suggest that the unreconstructed theology (or nontheology, as some would insist) of Russian Orthodoxy and its inherent attachment to the inequalities of the past can be the basis of a new alliance for the Soviet experiment? It is fine for Solzhenitsyn to be nostalgic about "the pure flame of the Christian faith" kept alive by the peasantry and to urge "love for the church," but has that faith or that church learned anything from the circumstances that led to its present cruel repression? For that matter, have the "secular dissidents" proposed any program for positive social change other than that they ought not to be silenced? It seems more than

possible that the alliance between secular intellectuals and the church's faithful will simply result in making the former appear as a thoroughly reactionary force, thus inviting further repression from the authorities, who, after all, cannot disown their socialist aspirations, no matter how much their previous actions have been a travesty of those aspirations.

Joel Nickelsburg

Chicago, Illinois

William C. Fletcher Responds:

Mr. Nickelsburg raises some ideas which, inexplicably, should have been raised some years ago but were not. My substantial reactions may be confined to two points, one minor, the other major. The lesser point is the inference I draw that one should not "simply repudiate the past." Historically, the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of the Soviet Union did attempt to do precisely that in 1917, and therefore the suggestion that the present leadership must envision a future that somehow incorporates the past (whether pre-1917 or pre-1953) is not self-evident. My own opinion is shared by a number of contemporary Soviet writers with regard to Stalinism, and German citizens with regard to National Socialism.

It is Mr. Nickelsburg's plea for "serious consideration of what comes after" which raises an issue that causes me more discomfort. I should note that my own crystal ball is no less clouded than that of those early Bolsheviks who, upon discovering that the Revolution was not imminent in Germany, confidently prognosticated that Islam would carry the banner of the Communist eschaton.

I think Mr. Nickelsburg is mistaken—and perhaps dangerously so—in his inference that the church "can be the basis of a new alliance for the Soviet experiment." I detect a certain inclination toward a totalitarian view of the body politik in this approach. Mr. Nickelsburg is quite correct in excoriating a vision of the future based on the secular rule of the Orthodox Church. I was absolutely appalled by the platform of the "Union

for the Liberation of the Russian People" in Leningrad in 1968 which posited just such a theocracy. I confess to being an admirer of John Calvin, but his experiment in theocratic rule still leaves the faintest scent of brimstone, the faded footprint of the cloven hoof, in Geneva.

I do not advocate an alliance of dissenters *couping* the *état* in the USSR. This would amount to a substitution of totalitarianism no less awful than that of Castro for Batista, or that of the *πενταγων* for King Konstantin. What I do advocate is not a transfer of totalitarianisms but a replacement of totalitarianism by pluralism. I would envision (in my fond and un-*Realpolitik* dreams) a society in which one is free to think what he likes rather than having the juggernaut of conformity imposed on him by force. A man, I think, should be free to dream dreams other than those of Socialist Realism, of a mystical sort, of a theological sort, or of any other sort up to and including phrenology and a Flat Earth. This is what I mean by a pluralistic society. In this view (*pace* Nickelsburg), I do plead "guilty of viewing dissent as a political end in itself."

India's "Power Politics" Defended

To the Editors: I must compliment the editors for printing three interesting essays (August *Worldview*) on the theory and practice of India's social and political norms and the effect of Bangladesh upon modern international relations. My comments relate to two points, and the purpose is to suggest that one *ought not* to regard India's action in Bangladesh as a radical departure from the theory and practice of Indian non-alignment. The difference is one of degree rather than kind, and it relates to the manner of execution of a strategic plan rather than in the idea. Let me elaborate this.

First: Professor Gunnar Myrdal is quoted on page 35 as saying that "renunciation of power politics" is

(continued on p. 62)