'We Beg You To Interfere'

The words of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, no doubt, lose something in translation from Russian, but perhaps they lose more without the presence of the man himself.

When he spoke last week before a huge banquet hall of American labor leaders and Washington dignitaries, assembled by the AFL-CIO, Solzhenitsyn talked ad-lib from notes, his voice audible in Russian but overtracked in volume by the interpreter delivering a simultaneous version in English.

Despite these handicaps of communication, the Russian novelist conveyed, by his voice and body, the presence of a giant, a poet with a sense of life so strong and uncompromised that normal mortals blush for him or draw back. His message was political, of course, but the experience of seeing him belonged to literature.

Solzhenitsyn is a shocking figure, standing on an American podium, speaking to an audience which, though friendly, is conditioned by the cool style of modern political speeches. Solzhenitsyn insisted upon his right to deliver an oration in the classical meaning of that form, though it is now nearly dead in this country.

A portable microphone was draped around his neck, so that he could roam freely on the platform, away from the rostrum. He spoke, not in orderly cadence, but in bursts of language, waving his arms in heroic gestures to mark an exclamation point, to plead for a sympathetic reaction.

The content of Solzhenitsyn's address was, if anything, more disconcerting than his delivery. Like an old Chatauqua lecturer, he endeavored to enlighten his audience, to teach some history. But his perspective is so unlike ours. His outrage focused on events so distant in the past, crucial decisions which Americans have long forgotten, if they ever knew about them. Is it possible for a man to be still so angry today over what happened in 1937 or 1914? For Solzhenitsyn, it is.

Like a stormy character in a great Russian novel, his passion sweeps aside all the doubt and ambiguity in modern life. The moral choices, he insists, are simple and clear, requiring only great courage. Like a 19th Century evangelist, he summoned his audience to a great awakening and, like those earlier gatherings in revival tents, they went away fatigued and puzzled by his powerful presence.

The following is excerpted from that address.

THERE IS A RUSSIAN proverb: "The yes-man is your enemy, but your friend will argue with you." It is precisely because I am the friend of the United States that I have come to tell you: My friends, I'm not going to tell you sweet words. The situation in the world is not just dangerous, it isn't just threatening, it is catastrophic.

Something that is incomprehensible to the ordinary human mind has taken place. We over there, the powerless, average Soviet people, couldn't understand, year after year and decade after decade, what was happening. How were we to explain this? England, France the United States, were victorious in the Second World War. Victorious states always dictate peace, they receive firm conditions, they create the sort of situation which accords with their philosophy, their concept of liberty, their concept of national interest.

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Instead of this, beginning in Yalta, your statesmen of the West, for some inexplicable reason, have signed one capitulation after another. Never has the West or your President Roosevelt imposed any conditions on the Soviet Union for obtaining aid. He gave unlimited aid, and then unlimited concessions. Already in Yalta, the occupation of Mongolia, Moldavia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania was silently recognized. Immediately after that, almost nothing was done to protect Eastern Europe, and seven or eight more countries were surrendered.

And after that, for another 30 years, the constant retreat, the surrender of one country after another, to such a point that there are Soviet satellites even in Africa, and almost all of Asia is taken over by them, Portugal is rolling down the precipice.

During those 30 years, more was surrendered to totalitarianism than any defeated country has ever surrendered after any war in history. There was no war, but there might as well have been.

For a long time we in the East couldn't understand this. We couldn't understand the flabbiness of the truce concluded in Vietnam. Any average Soviet citizen understood that this was a sly device which made it possible for North Vietnam to take over South Vietnam when it so chose. And suddenly, this was rewarded by the Nobel Prize for Peace—a tragic and ironic prize.

This is very dangerous for one's view of the world when this feeling comes on: "Go ahead, give it up." We already hear voices in your country and in the West—"Give up Korea and we will live quietly. Give up Portugal, of course; give up Japan; give up Israel, give up Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand; give up ten more African countries. Just let us live in peace and quiet. Just let us drive our big cars on our splendid highways; just let us play tennis and golf in peace and quiet; just let us mix our cocktails in peace and quiet as we are accustomed to doing; just let us see the beautiful toothy smile with a glass in hand on every advertisement page of our magazines."

But look how things have turned out: Now in the West this has all turned into an accusation against the United States. Now in the West, we hear very many voices saying, "It's your fault, America." And, here, I must decisively defend the United States against these accusations.

I have to say that the United States, of all the countries of the West, is the least guilty in all this and has done the most in order to prevent it. The United States has helped Europe to win the First and the Second World Wars. It raised Europe from post-war destruction twice. For 10, 20, 30 years it has stood as a shield protecting Europe while European countries were counting their nickels, to avoid paying for their standing armies.

The United States has long shown itself to be the most magnanimous, the most generous country in the world. Wherever there is a flood, an earthquake, a fire, a natural disaster, disease, who is the first to help? The United States. Who helps the most and unselfishly? The United States.

And what do we hear in reply? Reproaches, curses, "Yankee Go Home." American cultural centers are burned, and the representatives of the Third World jump on tables to vote against the United States.

But this does not take the load off America's shoulders. The course of history—whether you like it or not—has made you the leaders of the world. Your country can no longer think provincially. Your political leaders can no longer think only of their own states, only of their parties, of petty arrangements which may or may not lead to promotion. You must think about the whole world, and when the new political crisis in the world will arise (I think we have just come to the end of a very acute crisis and the next one will come any moment), the main decisions will fall anyway on the shoulders of the United States.

Here I have heard some explanations of the situation. Let me quote some of them: "It is impossible to protect those who do not have the will to defend themselves." I agree with that, but this was said about South Vietnam. In one-half of today's Europe and in three-quarters of today's world the will to defend oneself is even less than it was in South Vietnam.

We are told: "We cannot defend those who are unable to defend themselves with their own human resources." But against the overwhelming powers of totalitarianism, when all of this power is thrown against a country, no country can defend itself with its own resources. For instance, Japan doesn't have a standing army.

We are told, "We should not protect [illegible]"

those who do not have full democracy. This is the most remarkable argument of the lot. This is the *leitmotif* I hear in your newspapers and in the speeches of some of your political leaders. Who in the world, ever, on the front line of defense against totalitarianism has been able to sustain full democracy? You, the united democracies of the world, were not able to sustain it! America, England, France, Canada, Australia, together did not sustain it. At the first threat of Hitlerism you stretched out your hands to Stalin. You call that sustaining democracy? No!

And there is more of the same: "If the Soviet Union is going to use détente for its own ends, then we . . ." But what will happen then? The Soviet Union has used détente in its own interests, is using it now and will continue to use it in its own interests. For example, China and the Soviet Union, both actively participating in détente, have grabbed three countries of Indochina. True, perhaps as a consolation, China will send you a ping-pong team.

To understand properly what detente has meant all these 40 years — friendships, stabilization of the situation, trade, etc.—I would have to tell you something of how it looked from the other side. Let me tell you how it looked. Mere acquaintance with an American—and God forbid that you should sit with him in a cafe or restaurant—meant a ten-year term for suspicion of espionage.

During Nixon's last visit to Moscow your American correspondents were reporting in the Western way from the streets of Moscow. "I am going down a Russian street with a microphone and asking the ordinary Soviet citizen: 'Tell me please, what do you think about the meeting between Nixon and Brezhnev?'" And, amazingly, every last person answered: "Wonderful. I'm delighted. I'm absolutely overjoyed." What does this mean? If I'm going down a street in Moscow and some American comes up to me with a microphone and asks me something, then I know that on the other side of him is a member of the state security, also with a microphone, who is recording everything I say. You think that I'm going to say something that is going to put me in prison immediately? Of course I say: "It's wonderful, I'm delighted, I'm overjoyed."

THE SOVIET SYSTEM is so closed that it is almost impossible for you to understand from here. Your theoreticians and scholars write works trying to explain how things occur there. Here are some naive explanations which are simply funny to Soviet citizens. Some say that the Soviet leaders have now given up their inhumane ideology. Not at all. They haven't given it up one bit.

Some say that in the Kremlin there are some on the left, some on the right. And they are fighting with each other, and we've got to behave in such a way as not to interfere with those on the left side. This is all fantasy: Left . . . Right. There is some sort of a struggle for power, but they all agree on the essentials. There also exists the following theory—that now there is a technocracy in the Soviet Union, a growing number of engineers and the engineers are now running the economy and will soon determine the fate of the country, rather than the party. I will tell you, though, that the engineers determine the fate of the economy just as much as our generals determine the fate of the Army. That means zero. Everything is done the way the party demands. That's our system. Judge it for yourself.

It's a system where for 40 years there haven't been genuine elections but simply a comedy, a farce. Thus, a system which has no legislative organs. It's a system without an independent press; a system without an independent judiciary; where the people have no influence either on external or internal policy; where any thought which is different from what the state thinks is crushed.

And let me tell you that electronic bugging in our country is such a simple thing that it's a matter of everyday life. You had an instance in the United States where a bugging caused an uproar which lasted for a year and a half. For us it's an everyday matter. Almost every apartment, every institution has its bug and it doesn't surprise us in the least—we are used to it.

It's a system where unmasked butchers of millions like Molotov and others smaller than him have never been tried in the courts but retire on tremendous pensions in the greatest comfort. It's a system where the very constitution has never been carried out for one single day. Where all the decisions mature in secrecy, high up in a small, irresponsible group, and then are released on us and on you like a bolt of lightning.

SO WHAT ARE we to conclude from that? Is detente needed or not? Not only is it needed, it's as necessary as air. It's the only way of saving the

earth—instead of a world war to have detente, but a true detente, and if it has already been ruined by the bad word which we use for it—"Detente"—we should find another word for it.

I would say that there are very few, only three, main characteristics of such a true detente:

In the first place, there would be disarmament—not only disarmament from the use of war but also from the use of violence. We must stop using not only the sort of arms which are used to destroy one's neighbors but the sort of arms which are used to oppress one's fellow countrymen. It is not detente if we here with you today can spend our time agreeably while over there people are groaning and dying and in psychiatric hospitals. Doctors are making their evening rounds for the third time injecting people with drugs which destroy their brain cells.

The second sign of detente, I would say, is the following: That it be not one based on smiles, not on verbal concessions, but it has to be based on a firm foundation. You know the words from the Bible: "Build not on sand, but on rock." There has to be a guarantee that this will not be broken overnight, and for this the other side—the other party to the agreement—must have its acts subject to public opinion, to the press, and to a freely-elected parliament. And until such control exists there is absolutely no guarantee.

The third simple condition — what sort of detente is it when they employ the sort of inhumane propaganda which is proudly called in the Soviet Union "ideological warfare"? Let us not have that. If we're going to be friends let's be friends, if we're going to have detente then let's have detente, and an end to ideological warfare.

The Soviet Union and the Communist countries can conduct negotiations. They know how to do this. For a long time they don't make any concessions and then they give in a little bit. Then everyone says triumphantly, "Look, they've made a concession; it's time to sign." The 35 countries (at the European Security Conference) for two years now have painfully, painfully been negotiating and their nerves were stretched to the breaking point and they finally gave in. A few women from the Communist countries can now marry foreigners. And a few newspapermen are now going to be permitted to travel a little more than before. They give 1/1000th of what natural law should provide. Matters which people should be able to do even before such negotiations are undertaken. And already there is joy, and here in the West we hear many voices, saying: "Look, they're making concessions; it's time to sign."

During these two years of negotiations, in all the countries of Eastern Europe the pressure has increased, the oppression intensified. And it is precisely now that the Austrian Chancellor says, "We've got to sign this agreement as rapidly as possible."

What sort of an agreement would this be? The proposed agreement is the funeral of Eastern Europe. It means that Western Europe would finally, once and for all, sign away Eastern Europe, stating that it is perfectly willing to see Eastern Europe be crushed and overwhelmed once and for all, but please don't bother us. And the Austrian Chancellor thinks that if all these countries are pushed into a mass grave, Austria at the edge of this grave will survive and not fall into it.

AND, WE, FROM our lives there, have concluded that violence can only be withstood by firmness.

You have to understand the nature of Communism. The very ideology of Communism, all of Lenin's teachings, are that anyone is considered to be a fool who doesn't take what's lying in front of him. If you can take it, take it. If you can attack, attack. But if there's a wall, then go back. And the Communist leaders respect only firmness and laugh at persons who continually give in to them. Your people are now saying, "Power, without any attempt at conciliation, will lead to a world conflict." But I would say that power with continual subservience is no power at all.

From our experience I can tell you that only firmness will make it possible to withstand the assaults of Communist totalitarianism. We see many historic examples. Look at little Finland in 1939 which by its own forces withstood the attack. You, in 1948, defended Berlin only by your firmness of spirit, and there was no world conflict. In Korea in 1950 you stood up against the Communists, only by your firmness, and there was no world conflict. In 1962 you compelled the rockets to be removed from Cuba, and there was no world conflict. We, the dissidents of the U.S.S.R., don't have any tanks, we don't have any weapons, we have no organization. We don't have anything. Our hands are empty. We have only a heart and what we have lived through in the half century of this system. And when we have found the firmness within ourselves to stand up for our rights, we have done so. It's only by firmness of spirit that we have withstood.

I don't want to mention a lot of names because however many I might mention there are more still. And when we resolve the question with two or three names, it is as if we forget and betray the others. We should rather remember figures. There are tens of thousands of political prisoners in our country and — by the calculation of English specialists—7,000 persons are now under compulsory psychiatric treatment.

Let's take Vladimir Bukovsky as an example. It was proposed to him, "All right, we'll free you. Go to the West and shut up." And this young man, a youth today on the verge of death, said: "No, I won't go this way. I have written about the persons whom you have put in insane asylums. You release them and then I'll go West." This is what I mean by that firmness of spirit to stand up against granite and tanks!

WE NEED NOT have had our conversation on the level of business calculations. Why did such and such a country act in such and such a way? What were they counting on? We should rather rise above this to the moral level and, say: "In 1933 and in 1941 your leaders and the whole Western World, in an unprincipled way, made a deal with totalitarianism." We will have to pay for this, some day this deal will come back to haunt us. For 30 years we have been paying for it and we're still paying for it. And we're going to pay for it in a worse way. One cannot think only in the low level of political calculations. It's necessary to think also of what is noble, and what is honorable—not only what is profitable.

Resourceful Western legal scholars have now introduced the term "legal realism." By this legal realism, they want to push aside any moral evaluation of affairs. They say, "Recognize realities; if such and such laws have been established in such and such countries of violence, then these laws must also be recognized and respected."

It is widely accepted among lawyers that law is higher than morality—law is something which is worked out and developed, whereas morality is something inchoate and amorphous. That isn't the case. The opposite is rather true. Morality is higher than law, while law is our human attempt somehow to embody in rules a part of that moral sphere which is above us. We try to understand this morality, bring it down to earth and present it in a form of laws. Sometimes we are more successful, sometimes less. Sometimes you actually have a caricature of morality, but morality is always higher than law. And this view must never be abandoned. We must accept it with heart and soul.

It is almost a joke now in the Western world, in the 20th Century, to use words like "good" and "evil." They have become almost old-fashioned concepts, but they are very real and genuine concepts. These are concepts from a sphere which is higher than us — good and evil. And instead of getting involved in base, petty, short-sighted political calculations and games, we have to recognize that the concentra-