



*Alexander Solzhenitsyn*

# *The Exiles: No Escaping Literary Wars*

*By John M. Goshko*

*Goshko is The Washington Post's Bonn correspondent.*



*Guenter Grass*

**B**ONN — For critics and scholars, it was among the year's most eagerly awaited events — the chance to find such renowned Russian exile writers as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Andrey Sinyavsky and Joseph Brodsky all appearing under the same cover. That was the prospect held out by Kontinent, a new periodical designed as a forum for East European dissident intellectuals.

The first issue, published recently in Russian and German editions, kept its promise. Its pages were studded with previously unpublished works by some of the biggest names in Russian exile circles. And there were others as well: Romania's Eugene Ionesco, Yugoslavia's Milovan Djilas and Hungary's Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty.

But what should have been a major literary happening somehow got bogged down in a nasty political controversy. So far, most of the talk caused by Kontinent's appearance has centered less on its intellectual content than on the way it has become an issue in domestic German affairs.

Even before the first issue appeared, West Germany's best-known novelist, Guenter Grass, attacked Solzhenitsyn and Sinyavsky harshly for their association with Kontinent. In an open letter to the two Russians, Grass charged them with fostering "the same reactionary intolerance" which "under different ideological markings forced you in the Soviet Union to protest and to resist."

### The Springer Role

**W**HAT AROUSED Grass' ire was the role played in Kontinent's founding by Axel Springer, West Germany's most powerful and most controversial press lord. Springer put up the money to launch the publication, and one of his subsidiaries, the Ullstein book publishing concern, is putting out the German-language edition of Kontinent. Because of the shrill and uncompromising crusade that he conducts in his newspapers against communism, student radicalism and most vestiges of the permissive society, Springer has long been the principal bete noir of West German liberal intellectuals like Grass.

As a result, when Wolf Jobst Siedler, the director of Ullstein, invited the author of "The Tin Drum" to write "a few words of welcome" for Kontinent, Grass responded with a "Dear Andrey and Dear Alexander" letter that began, "I take the liberty of telling you, without mincing words, what I think of your project."

Grass wrote: "I cannot understand how you, as writers with moral criteria, could through such a collaboration offer support to a power complex so

dangerous to Western democracy. Each day in the publications of the Springer concern, there is disseminated exactly that which you experienced in the Soviet Union, if in totalitarian extent, namely, falsification of information according to doctrinaire opinions, demonization of political opponents, appeals to the latent violence in the so-called silent majority, the condemnation of the accused as already guilty—all of which has led your fellow writers to feel anxious about the future of democracy in West Germany."

He characterized the Springer empire as "a part of that Power of Money or Statism whose corrupt activities

both you and I fear so much" and asked: "Must one, in order to express a justified opposition to totalitarian communism, seek support from those forces who were never seriously annoyed by Western dictatorships and who in anti-Communist blindness are altogether prepared to drive out the Communist devil with the Fascist beelzebub?"

"For all my respect for the courage which you demonstrated in the Soviet Union in your struggle against an autocratic state power, I cannot approve your cooperation with the Springer concern," Grass concluded. "I beg you to reconsider your venture. You are keeping very bad company."

### A Furious Solzhenitsyn

**H**IS ATTACK drew an immediate response from both Russians. Solzhenitsyn's reply was especially furious: "Can one be choosy about a publisher when you think of the 400 million oppressed people in the East? Weren't the Western writers very happy when they were published in the Soviet Union? And who published them? Free publishers or the state-owned publishers of our executioners?"

Sinyavsky, whose writings first became known in the West when published under the name "Abram Terz" and who was, with Yuri Daniel, a defendant in one of the most famous Moscow dissident trials, answered Grass in quieter and more thoughtful terms. Stating that "I am not very well acquainted with the situation in the West" and "have no experience, at all of the conflicts within Western democratic societies," he told Grass that "your apparent concern is a partisan struggle between various groups."

"But," Sinyavsky continued, "our concern, mine and those of my friends, is simply the magazine, Kontinent, itself. Our venture is, to my mind, a challenging and promising beginning—a journal which attempts to bring together a whole group of writers in Eastern and Western Europe, among

them not a few in Russia whose work is done in the shadow of the prisons, camps and lunatic asylums."

He chided Grass for comparing Springer's activities with "the publishing conditions of present-day Soviet Russia" and said: "Your point of reference is a pile of opinionated newspaper clippings which you found unjustifiable. But our point of reference is a mountain of corpses, and among them writers and poets. Can it really be that you equate a Hitler or a Stalin with a distasteful polemic in a newspaper?"

Sinyavsky noted that Grass had made his attack before he had seen a copy of Kontinent. "It is completely beyond my comprehension why you should feel it necessary to speak out against a venture which has not even seen the light of day—to disrupt a magazine whose first number you have not yet read and whose quality you presume to judge only by the imprint of the publishing house.

"What would you think of Russian readers of Western books—from Faulkner to Boell—who passed judgment on writers and works without having read them, and only on the basis of the imprint of the Soviet periodical or publisher who happened to put them out (always of course by permission of the KGB)?"

"Herr Grass," he concluded, "why don't you and I talk about books, about writers and their works—and not about financial corporations... I hope, and I share this with my colleagues on the journal Kontinent, that on this point nothing will change to the end of our days: that we write according to our inner convictions."

### Brisk Sales

**S**INYAVSKY'S WORDS underscored what many regard as the most unfortunate aspect of the controversy—that Grass' anti-Springer blast, together with the outpouring of commentary that it has since provoked, had obscured the effort to see what ideas are expressed in Kontinent and

to weigh them on their own merits.

The venture was born earlier this year after the world-wide headlines triggered by Solzhenitsyn's expulsion from the Soviet Union. With that publicity boost, the exiles were able to win a sympathetic hearing for their hopes of establishing their own forum.

Solzhenitsyn encouraged the project by promising to become a regular contributor and even suggested *Kontinent* as its title. However, since taking up residence in Zurich, the 56-year-old Solzhenitsyn has become increasingly reclusive. In fact, except for his recent appearance in Stockholm to accept the Nobel Prize for literature awarded to him four years ago, he has tended to shun almost all contact with Westerners and Western society.

Accordingly, he also refused to become one of *Kontinent's* editors, and the main job of organizing the new publication fell to Vladimir Maximov, another dissident writer ("The Seven Days of Creation") who left the Soviet Union in March and now lives in Paris.

Maximov then approached Springer for backing, and the result was a complicated deal that saw Springer's Ullstein subsidiary set up a special *Kontinent* Publishing Co. in the West German city of Darmstadt. The financial division gives all rights to the Russian edition to the exile contributors, with Ullstein getting the rights to the German edition.

Both editions are published in a paperback format, and despite the high price (\$6.50 for the German editions), the first issue has had very brisk sales. The 7,000 Russian copies printed have been almost totally sold out, and the German edition's sales already have topped 25,000.

In addition, largely on the strength of Solzhenitsyn's promise to be a regular contributor, plans are under way to start several other foreign-language editions. The American edition, to be published by Doubleday, will probably make its debut in the spring, along with British, French, Dutch and Italian

versions. At present, *Kontinent* officials are negotiating over the rights for Spanish and Turkish editions.

Under current plans, the so-called "central" or Russian edition will be a quarterly. Because of translation difficulties and other factors, those editions published elsewhere will probably appear only twice a year, although the publishers have the right to go up to four issues if they wish.

### A Rightist Bias?

**O**N THE BOARD of editors serving under Maximov, Springer is represented by George Bailey, an American journalist who was for several years the European correspondent of the now-defunct Reporter magazine. Bailey describes his function as a coordinator, "all-around errand runner and the guy who keeps nagging people about deadlines and things like that."

In reply to the charge that Springer's interest in *Kontinent* is prompted solely by his anti-Communist fervor, Bailey insists that the German publisher and his representatives have maintained a strict hands-off policy regarding the publication's editorial freedom. He says, "That they publish is our affair. What they publish is their affair."

In addition to Maximov, who has the title of managing editor, and Bailey, the editorial board includes roughly 20 people ranging all the way from Robert Conquest, the British Kremlinologist, to the Russian Orthodox Archbishop of San Francisco. The great majority, however, are emigres from the Soviet Union and the other Communist-ruled countries of Eastern Europe.

Some sources within the faction-ridden world of East European exile politics have charged that *Kontinent* is dominated by people with a clearly rightist bias. As proof, they cite the association of such figures as Cardinal Mindszenty, an unabashed spokesman for clericalism, and Ludek Pachman, a leader of the 1968 "Prague spring"

movement in Czechoslovakia who more recently has become a close supporter of West Germany's right-of-center Christian Democratic Union.

### "Religious Idealism"

HOWEVER, AN examination of the Kontinent's board does not support such a generalization. In general, most students of the emigre political scene tend to divide the activist exiles from Eastern Europe into three rough groups: those who remain Marxist in conviction but who oppose the Soviet brand of communism; those whose opposition to the Soviet-led system is based on considerations of civil liberties and civil rights, and those with an almost mystical belief that the Communist countries must eventually return to some kind of religious orthodoxy.

If any of these groups does indeed dominate Kontinent, it is probably the last one. Maximov is regarded as deeply religious, and Solzhenitsyn lately has spent a lot of time expounding the theory that a nonviolent, non-ideological resistance movement with strong religious overtones will eventually bring down the Communist system in the Soviet Union.

There is an echo of the religious impulse in a declaration of moral principles that is printed in the Russian edition but omitted from the German issue. The list reads: "Unconditional religious idealism—a sustained spiritual alliance with representatives of other faiths though with a dominating Christian tendency."

However, several editors have since been at pains to elaborate on what this means. It refers, they say, only to the broad ideals of the Western Christian ethic. That, they add, is an umbrella capable of sheltering a very broad range of attitudes and opinions.

The first issue, at least, seems to bear out their point about diversity. Its offerings range from an interview with Czech writer Ota Filip about the attitudes of intellectuals in Czechoslovakia today to "Dialectic Materialism—The Progressive Ideology," an unpublished chapter of Solzhenitsyn's famed novel, "The First Circle."

There are three poems by Brodsky, regarded by many as the greatest living poet in the Russian language, an excerpt from Vladimir Kornilov's novel, "Without Arms, Without Legs," and an almost tongue-in-cheek essay on "The Metaphysical Situation in Russia Today" by Alexander Piatigorsky, formerly the Soviet Union's ranking expert on the culture of India.

And underscoring this diversity is a

foreword contributed by Andrei Sakharov, the physicist who is still in the Soviet Union and who is perhaps the best-known leader of those who oppose the Soviet system because of its abuse of civil liberties. He writes:

"The contributors are people who have spent a considerable portion of their lives in socialist countries. The reality in these countries represents an historical phenomenon that is only understood with great difficulty in the West.

"Its social, economic and intellectual characteristics cannot be gauged from the window of an Intourist coach or the official Communist press. That is why these people have something to tell the world. An opportunity of this nature cannot be overestimated."