

Ford Now Trying to Arrange Solzhenitsyn Meeting

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President Ford, having first avoided a proposed meeting with Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, is now trying to arrange one. But the exiled Soviet author is reportedly insisting on a written invitation to the White House.

Well-placed Congressional officials said today that the President sent word to Mr. Solzhenitsyn on Tuesday, when the Nobel laureate was honored at a Capitol Hill reception, that Mr. Ford would welcome a meeting.

But the officials said that Mr. Solzhenitsyn had replied through Senator Jesse A. Helms, Republican of North Carolina, that he would meet Mr. Ford only in response to a formal invitation.

One official said it appeared doubtful that Mr. Ford would extend such an invitation, despite White House recognition of the political embarrassment resulting from the failure to arrange a meeting.

"Both sides are going to let it lie and hope it all blows away," the official said.

Secretary of State Kissinger acknowledged at a news conference in Milwaukee yesterday that he had counseled Mr. Ford against meeting the Soviet exile because the "symbolic effect" of a conference with a critic of the Soviet Government would have been diplomatically "disadvantageous."

Until Mr. Kissinger made the statement, the White House had contended that Mr. Ford's rejection of two requests for meetings with Mr. Solzhenitsyn had been based only on lack of time and on a Presidential desire for meetings that were

"substantive" rather than "symbolic."

Following a spate of sharp criticism of Mr. Ford in letters to the White House, editorials and statements by leading conservatives in Congress, Mr. Ford made known through a spokesman Saturday that he would be "pleased" to meet with Mr. Solzhenitsyn.

A Congressional official said that Senator Helms, one of the severest critics of Mr. Ford's judgment in the matter, had received four telephone calls from White House aides on Tuesday conveying the President's interest. One of the calls reached Mr. Helms as he was meeting with Mr. Solzhenitsyn in the office of Senator Henry M. Jackson, Democrat of Washington. Mr. Helms whispered the message to Mr. Solzhenitsyn, who reportedly replied that he would only accept a written invitation.

"He was obviously offended," one witness to the exchange said of Mr. Solzhenitsyn. "His nose is out of joint and I don't blame him."

A senior White House official said late today that he expected "We'll get him in here at some point." But he declined to say whether a formal invitation would be sent.

'Working on the Matter'

Ron Nessen, the White House Press Secretary, said he understood that Senator Strom Thurmond, Republican of South Carolina, and Senator Helms were "working on the matter."

The President turned down a request by the two senators for a meeting with Mr. Solzhenitsyn on June 30. Mr. Ford also declined an invitation from the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Or-

ganizations to attend a dinner the same day in the writer's honor.

Mr. Nessen insisted at a news briefing today that his responses—the crowded White House schedule and Mr. Ford's preference for "substantive" meetings—had been "forthcoming" replies to questions about the President's initial decision not to see the novelist.

President Ford's schedule today was a crowded one. It included a telephone call to Soviet and American crews of the orbiting Soyuz and Apollo space craft.

Several of the President's public events were evidently of substance, including a discussion of military aid to Turkey with 129 members of Congress; a meeting with advisers on arms control and a visit with leading scientists to discuss the role of a revived White House office of science and technology.

But Mr. Ford also took time to greet the 1974 National Farm Family of the Year, Mr. and Mrs. James Ottoman and their daughter, Dana, of Malin, Ore. The Ottomans gave Mr. Ford two books, one of which was "The Complete Potato Cookbook."

In addition, the President greeted a number of guests briefly to receive such gifts as a wood carving of the 33d degree Masonic seal, a bicentennial painting from the Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Chamber of Commerce, a bicentennial quilt and pillow from a family in Grand Haven, Mich., and what the White House described as "a relief map of the state of Alaska sculpted out of remnants of the steel and piping used in construction of the Alaska pipeline."