

# Life Without Dreams

By Anthony Lewis

In his speech to the Helsinki Conference, President Ford emphasized its pledges of freer movement for people and ideas. "It is important," he told the leaders of thirty-four other countries there, "that you recognize the deep devotion of the American people and their Government to human rights and fundamental freedom."

How embarrassingly hollow those words must have sounded. For Mr. Ford had just had a chance to demonstrate his devotion to human rights in the simplest way—by meeting a man who symbolizes the struggle for them—and he failed the test.

The decision not to invite Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to the White House has been deplored by now from all points of the ideological compass. For sheer political ineptitude it was in a special class. But beyond that, the episode teaches us some things about the nature of political life.

Right-wing politicians and commentators in the United States seized on Solzhenitsyn's presence here as a way to dramatize their argument that détente is a mistake because the Soviet Union can never be trusted. The only way to deal with Communism, they say, is to oppose it everywhere by military strength—and increase the already enormous burden of the arms budget.

President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger allowed that view to occupy the field by their foolishness. But the special importance of Solzhenitsyn does not lie in any particular political stance, or in his own Christian-Slav mysticism. It lies in his person, his witness, his words. Solzhenitsyn has shown the world that one human being, through his courage and his art, can inflict moral defeat on the most powerful of tyrannies. He has reminded us of the potentialities of the human spirit. And of course that achievement transcends any narrow politics.

The United States cannot ordinarily help the victims of tyranny by means of bombs or missiles. We do not live in that kind of world. Our recourse has to be to other ways of pressure: political and economic and psycho-

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logical. One of the most important things we can do is simply to make clear that we have a commitment to human rights—a commitment going beyond immediate political considerations.

For those who live under oppression, it can make all the difference to know that somewhere outside others care about them and share their views of humanity. That is why those who suffer discrimination in South Africa give such an emotional welcome to visitors from abroad. And it is exactly the same for dissenters in the Soviet Union. It would have been a restoring symbol of hope, for them, if an American President had shaken the hand of Solzhenitsyn.

A second lesson of the episode, a sad one, is that we suffer these days from political leaders without ideals, without dreams. Their interest is limited to the immediate, their vision to power.

Consider the reason finally given for the decision of state to keep away from Solzhenitsyn. After various pathetic excuses from the White House, Mr. Kissinger gave this explanation: Solzhenitsyn's "views," if they became our "national policy," would threaten "military conflict."

Now I happen to think that that stated reason had nothing to do with the case. I think Henry Kissinger just cares much less about human rights and decency than he does about power and short-term political objectives. He sustains the right-wing governments of such countries as Chile and South Korea; despite their brutal character, because he thinks them helpful to his policy. And he does not want to let anything get in the way of his doing business with Leonid Brezhnev.

But in a way it would be worse if Mr. Kissinger really meant what he said. For the suggestion is that an American President dare not meet a person with bad ideas, however great a human being, lest the President be infected with his views and make them "national policy." Try to imagine Jefferson or Lincoln or Roosevelt afraid of ideas.

We ask our politicians to do the work of the day, and we should not expect them to show the same concern as artists for eternal truths. But we may begin to wonder, in this age, whether something has happened to make political leaders everywhere—not only in the United States—such narrow, humorless, insensitive creatures.

It is our own fault, as citizens, if we begin to see life in the politicians' limited terms. There is more in the stars than that. Generations thrill to Mozart that do not know the politicians of his age. Men will remember and read Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn when ~~Ford~~ Ford is a footnote to history: The name of a President who pardoned a predecessor.