

Solzhenitsyn's comeback and the 'Slavic core'

by Konstantin George

The Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn arrived by train in Moscow on July 21, completing a 55-day journey across the breadth of Russia which had begun in the Far Eastern port of Vladivostok. Solzhenitsyn, returning home after a 20-year exile abroad, has profiled himself as the "conscience of Russia" in its modern-day "Time of Troubles," attacking the disastrous and criminal shock therapy policies of the Russian leadership in the past three years. The numerous speeches and remarks he delivered at each rail stop on the way to Moscow were subject to a nearly total blackout by the state-run media.

At his arrival in Moscow, this abruptly changed. Reflecting a decision by the Russian elite, above the level of Boris Yeltsin, Solzhenitsyn's arrival was a highly celebrated media event. Covered live on Russian television were Solzhenitsyn's scathing attacks on the regime's shock therapy policies, and on the demographic and moral destruction these have brought to Russia. This media about-face marked the beginning of a shift in the Russian political-cultural realm, which will become more visible through the second half of this year.

Timed with this electronic media prominence was the publication in the July issue of the multimillion-circulation magazine *Novy Mir*, of an essay by Solzhenitsyn, "The Russian Question at the End of the 20th Century."

The real issue here behind the policy shift is not Solzhenitsyn himself, but the breakdown of the Russian physical economy, and the accompanying moral breakdown and demographic holocaust. According to the Russian Economics Ministry, during the first six months of 1994, industrial production fell by 26%. Since 1989, it has fallen by one-half, and there is no end in sight. In industrial plants all over

Russia, production has ground to a total halt this summer. The workforce has been sent on forced "vacations" for July and August, and told to report back to work on Sept. 1.

The Third Rome tendency

A large part of the Russian elite has, after collaborating with the austerity demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and enriching itself at the expense of the population, decided that, to preserve their own capacity as ruling caste of a new Russian Empire, Russia must move away from shock therapy. The shift is toward a break with western influences, toward Moscow re-emerging as the center of a Slavic empire, in a modern-day version of Russia's historic "Third Rome" imperial ideology. Solzhenitsyn, a critic of both the corrupt leadership of the Bolshevik era and of the *nomenklatura* that has ruled since 1992, and the clear exponent of a new Slavic empire based on what he calls "traditional Russian moral values," has become extremely useful to the elite.

Nomenklatura figures who in the past couldn't have cared less about Solzhenitsyn, suddenly came forward to be seen in his company. This was shown at the welcome prepared for him in Moscow by Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, a man who exemplifies the "*nouveau riche* class of thieves" that Solzhenitsyn has been denouncing for their "dollar onslaught" on the people of Russia. Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov, once again showing himself as an opportunist *par excellence*, was present in the front row, applauding Solzhenitsyn.

According to Moscow sources, Luzhkov, following in the footsteps of his predecessor Gavriil Popov, is reputed to have amassed a huge personal fortune over the past two

years. In his courtship of Solzhenitsyn, Luzhkov went beyond appearing on the reception podium with the writer. Luzhkov presented Solzhenitsyn with a large, comfortable apartment in the center of Moscow, a generous gift from the *nomenklatura* which Solzhenitsyn accepted.

The scramble to be associated with Solzhenitsyn extended beyond the arrival ceremonies. President Yeltsin, through his press spokesman, let it be known that he desired to meet with the writer "soon." The day before Solzhenitsyn's arrival in Moscow, the daily *Izvestia* printed an interview Yeltsin had given to the news agency Interfax, in which he declared that his goal is "to have Russia belong to the leading world powers." He called the return of Solzhenitsyn "a sign for the coming renewal" of Russia, and added, "I look forward to the arrival of Solzhenitsyn."

On the same day, Yeltsin suddenly recovered from a five-day cold to tour a Moscow art exhibition of painter Ilya Glazunov, a notorious exponent of Russia's Third Rome identity. In a further sign of the shift, the Russian elite lifted the ban on the film "The Great Criminal Revolution" by Stanislav Govorukhin, an adviser to the opposition grouped around former Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoy. The film is a trenchant portrayal of how Russia during the Gorbachov and Yeltsin years has come under the rule of a corrupt *nomenklatura*-mafia alliance (see *EIR*, July 15, 1994).

Russian geopolitics

The coming shift in Russia will unfortunately not be confined to the long-overdue break with IMF policies. All indications, including the favors suddenly granted to Solzhenitsyn, point to a move to consolidate a new Russian empire, at the expense of at least three currently independent nations: Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Solzhenitsyn, like nearly all other leading public figures in Russia, whatever other merits they might have, suffers from his own variant of Russian geopolitics, and favors some variant of a new empire.

The high-profile coverage of Solzhenitsyn has served to introduce or reintroduce a debate on exactly what the geographical contours of the new empire should be. Solzhenitsyn himself, as his televised statements affirmed, has emerged as an advocate for the policy that the empire should be confined to a Slavic core. He has attacked the concept of Rutskoy and others in the opposition for their wish to recreate an empire with the geographical scope of the former Soviet Union. Solzhenitsyn has declared that the Caucasus and Central Asia "belong to the Islamic world," which Russia is "not part of."

In a television interview, Solzhenitsyn called for creating a Slavic Union out of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, run by Moscow. One can see from this the shift from one form of immorality, allowing the rape of Russia by IMF policies, to another one. Solzhenitsyn's immediate solution to Russia's historical crisis, including its demographic one, is to annex these three republics, thereby bringing back into the fold about 20 million of the 25 million Russians now

living outside the borders of Russia. Beyond that, as Solzhenitsyn makes no secret of, is the intent of russifying as many of the Ukrainian and Belarusian population as possible, to regenerate the "Great Russian" stock.

His stance on what belongs and what does not belong in the new empire is not only based on considerations of pan-Slavic ideology—meaning which nationalities are "suitable" for russification and which aren't. Solzhenitsyn and others argue that the new empire will fail if it incorporates Central Asia, because it would then have to pour in enormous investments to overcome the results of 70 years of Bolshevik looting, investments which instead should be solely directed for the benefit of the Slavic core.

The fate of Ukraine and Belarus

The idea of a Slavic core has become the dominant one in the thinking of the Russian elite, especially in the wake of the recent presidential elections in Ukraine and Belarus, where Leonid Kuchma and Aleksandr Lukashenko, the candidates who favor union and integration with Russia, were victorious.

But the Russian elite's addiction to the geopolitics of reconquest has already produced a dichotomy in policy, concerning whether or not to break with the IMF. For the near future, such a break, to the extent it comes, will be confined to Russia. For reasons of easing the reconquest policy, the stabilizing benefits of such a break are not to be extended to other republics. Moscow's reasoning is quite simple and crude: The worse the economic and social situation in Ukraine becomes, the easier a reconquest will be.

The actions of Kuchma in Kiev since his July 10 election victory demonstrate this policy. Kuchma has been loudly demanding union with Russia, while also calling for an agreement with the IMF that will commit Ukraine to a vicious austerity policy. Only eight days after his July 19 inauguration, Kuchma met in Kiev with IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus, to discuss an agreement for more shock therapy.

These negotiations with the IMF are occurring while Ukraine is undergoing the worst production collapse of any industrial nation in modern history. Industrial production has fallen by a staggering 40% in the first six months of 1994. As in Russia, the rate of collapse is accelerating in the summer months. In Lviv and other Ukrainian cities, the workforce of every single industrial plant has been sent off on forced vacation for the summer, with orders not to report back to work until Sept. 1. The patience of the population, nothing short of extraordinary till now, is moving toward the breaking point.

The motive behind Kuchma's sacrificing what's left of Ukraine to the IMF is not hard to gauge. It is to enrage most of the population so much against the "West" that they will, with the exception of the staunchly patriotic West Ukraine, accept the Slavic Union alternative being prepared in Moscow.