

VINTAGE SOLZHENITSYN

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Александр
Солженицын

The Gulag Archipelago

ГУЛАГ

With a foreword by
Jordan B. Peterson

VINTAGE

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About the Book

WITH A NEW FOREWORD BY JORDAN B. PETERSON

‘Solzhenitsyn’s masterpiece... *The Gulag Archipelago* helped create the world we live in today’ Anne Applebaum

A vast canvas of camps, prisons, transit centres and secret police, of informers and spies and interrogators but also of everyday heroism, *The Gulag Archipelago* is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s grand masterwork. Based on the testimony of some 200 survivors, and on the recollection of Solzhenitsyn’s own eleven years in labour camps and exile, it chronicles the story of those at the heart of the Soviet Union who opposed Stalin, and for whom the key to survival lay not in hope but in despair.

A thoroughly researched document and a feat of literary and imaginative power, this edition of *The Gulag Archipelago* was abridged into one volume at the author’s wish and with his full co-operation.

‘[*The Gulag Archipelago*] helped to bring down an empire. Its importance can hardly be exaggerated’ Doris Lessing, *Sunday Telegraph*

About the Author

Aleksander Solzhenitsyn was born in Kislovodsk, Russia, in 1918. He was brought up in Rostov, where he graduated in mathematics and physics in 1941. After distinguished service with the Red Army in the Second World War, he was imprisoned from 1945 to 1953 for making unfavourable remarks about Joseph Stalin. He was rehabilitated in 1956, but in 1969 he was expelled from the Soviet Writers’ Union for denouncing official censorship of his work. He was forcibly exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974 and deported to West Germany. Later he settled in America, but after Soviet officials finally dropped charges against him in 1991, he returned to his homeland in 1994 and died in August 2008, aged eighty-nine.

Solzhenitsyn wrote many books, of which *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, *Cancer Ward* and *The Gulag Archipelago* are his best known.

ALSO BY ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN

Novels

In the First Circle

Cancer Ward

The Red Wheel

Stories & Poems

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

Matryona's Home

Miniatures (Prose Poems)

The Trail

Plays & Screenplays

Victory Celebrations

Prisoners

The Love-Girl and the Innocent

Candle in the Wind (The Light Which is in Thee)

Tanks Know the Truth

Memoirs

The Oak and the Calf

Between Two Millstones

Essays & Speeches

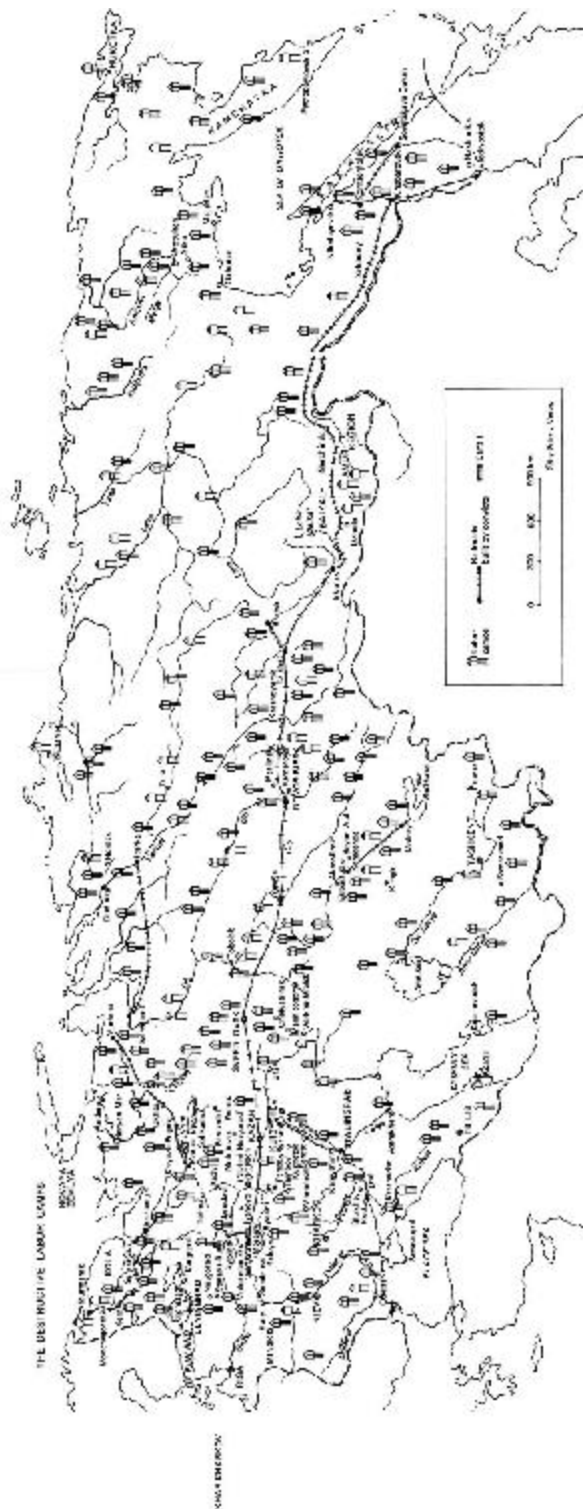
One Word of Truth (Nobel Lecture)

A World Split Apart (Harvard Address)

Letter to the Soviet Leaders

Rebuilding Russia

The Russian Question at the End of the Twentieth Century



I dedicate this

to all those who did not live

to tell it.

And may they please forgive me

for not having seen it all

nor remembered it all,

for not having divined all of it.

ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN

The Gulag Archipelago 1918–56

An Experiment in Literary Investigation

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY
Thomas P. Whitney and Harry Willetts

ABRIDGED AND INTRODUCED BY
Edward E. Ericson, Jr

WITH A FOREWORD BY
Jordan B. Peterson

VINTAGE

Foreword

Once we have taken up the word, it is thereafter impossible to turn away: A

writer is no detached judge of his countrymen and contemporaries; he is an accomplice to all the evil committed in his country or by his people. And if the tanks of his fatherland have bloodied the pavement of a foreign capital, then rust-colored stains have forever bespattered the writer's face. And if on some fateful night a trusting Friend is strangled in his sleep—then the palms of the writer bear the bruises from that rope. And if his youthful fellow citizens nonchalantly proclaim the advantages of debauchery over humble toil, if they abandon themselves to drugs, or seize hostages—then this stench too is mingled with the breath of the writer. Have we the insolence to declare that we do not answer for the evils of today's world? ... The simple act of an ordinary brave man is not to participate in lies, not to support false actions! His rule: Let **that** come into the world, let it even reign supreme—only not through me. But it is within the power of writers and artists to do much more: to **defeat the lie!** For in the struggle with lies art has always triumphed and shall always triumph! Visibly, irrefutably for all! Lies can prevail against much in this world, but never against art. ...

One word of truth shall outweigh the whole world.

—From the speech delivered by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to the Swedish Academy on the occasion of his acceptance of the Nobel Prize for Literature

First, you defend your homeland against the Nazis, serving as a twice-decorated soldier on the Eastern front in the criminally ill-prepared Soviet Red Army. Then, you're arrested, humiliated, stripped of your military rank, charged under the auspices of the all-purpose Article 58 with the dissemination of "anti-Soviet propaganda," and dragged off to Moscow's infamous Lubyanka prison. There, through the bars of your cell, you watch your beloved country celebrating its victory in the Great Patriotic War. Then you're sentenced, in *absentia*, to eight years of hard labor (but you got away easy; it wasn't so long afterward that people in your position were awarded a "tenner"—and then a quarter of a century!). And fate isn't finished with you, yet—not by any means. You develop a deadly cancer in the camp, endure the exile imposed on you after your imprisonment ends, and pass very close to death.

Despite all this, you hold your head high. You refuse to turn against man or God, although you have every reason to do so. You write, instead, secretly, at night, documenting your terrible experiences. You craft a personal memoir—a single day in the labor camps—and, miracle of miracles! The clouds part! The sun shines through! Your book is published, and in your own country! It meets with unparalleled acclaim, nationally and internationally. But the sky darkens, once again, and the sun disappears.

The repression returns. You become (once again) a “non-person.” The secret police—the dread KGB—seize the manuscript of your next book. It sees the light of day, nonetheless; but only in the West. There, your reputation grows beyond the wildest of imaginings. The Nobel Committee itself bestows upon you its highest literary honor.

The Soviet authorities, stripped of their camouflage, are enraged. They order the secret police to poison you. You pass (once again) near death. But you continue to write: driven, solitary, intolerably inspired. Your *The Gulag Archipelago* documents the absolute and utter corruption of the dogmas and doctrines of your state, your empire, your leaders—and yourself. And then: that is printed, too! Not in your own country, but in the West—once again—from copies oh-so-dangerously hidden, and smuggled across the borders. And your great book bursts with unparalleled and dreadful force into the still-naïve and unexpecting literary and intellectual world. You are expelled from the Soviet Union, stripped of your citizenship, forced to take residency in a society both strange to you and resistant, in its own way, to your prophetic words. But the power of your stories and the strength of your morals demolish any remaining claims to ethical and philosophical credibility still made by the defenders of the collectivist system that gave rise to all that you witnessed.

Years pass (but not so many, from the perspective of history). Then? Another miracle! The Soviet Union collapses! You return home. Your citizenship is restored. You write and speak in your reclaimed homeland until death claims you, in 2008. A year later *The Gulag Archipelago* is deemed mandatory reading by those responsible for establishing the national school curriculum of your home country. Your impossible victory is complete.

The three volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago*—one continuous, extended scream of outrage—are, paradoxically, brilliant, bitter, disbelieving, and infused with awe: awe at the strength characterizing the best among us, in the worst of all situations. In that monumental text, published in 1973, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn conducted “an experiment in literary investigation”—a hybrid of journalism, history, and biography, unlike anything ever written before or since. In 1985, the author bestowed his approval upon Edward E. Ericson, Jr’s single-volume abridgement—republished here, on the fiftieth anniversary of the completion of the full three-volume edition and centenary of the author’s birth—and sold some thirty million copies, in thirty-five languages. Between the pages of Solzhenitsyn’s book—apart from the documentation of the horrors of the legions of the dead, counted and uncounted, and the masses whose lives

were torn asunder—are the innumerable soul-chilling personal stories, carefully preserved, making the tragedy of mass betrayal, torture and death not the mere statistic Stalin so disdainfully described but individual, real and terrible.

It is a matter of pure historical fact that *The Gulag Archipelago* played a primary role in bringing the Soviet Empire to its knees. Although economically unsustainable, ruled in the most corrupt manner imaginable, and reliant on the slavery and enforced deceit of its citizens, the Soviet system managed to stumble forward through far too many decades before being cut to the quick. The courageous leaders of the labor unions in Poland, the great Pope John Paul II and the American President Ronald Reagan, with his blunt insistence that the West faced an evil empire, all played their role in its defeat and collapse. It was Solzhenitsyn, however, whose revelations made it positively shameful to defend not just the Soviet state, but the very system of thought that made that state what it was. It was Solzhenitsyn who most crucially made the case that the terrible excesses of Communism could not be conveniently blamed on the corruption of the Soviet leadership, the “cult of personality” surrounding Stalin, or the failure to put the otherwise stellar and admirable utopian principles of Marxism into proper practice. It was Solzhenitsyn who demonstrated that the death of

millions and the devastation of many more were, instead, a direct causal consequence of the philosophy (worse, perhaps: the theology) driving the Communist system. The hypothetically egalitarian, universalist doctrines of Karl Marx contained hidden within them sufficient hatred, resentment, envy and denial of individual culpability and responsibility to produce nothing but poison and death when manifested in the world.

For Marx, man was a member of a class, an economic class, a group—that, and little more—and history nothing but the battleground of classes, of groups. His admirers regarded (continue to regard) Marx's doctrine as one of compassion—moral by definition, virtuous by fiat: “consider the working classes, in all their oppression, and work forthrightly to free them.” But hate may well be a stronger and more compelling motivator than love. In consequence, it took no time, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, for solidarity with the common man and the apparently laudable demand for universal equality to manifest its unarticulated and ever-darkening shadow. First came the most brutal indictment of the “class enemy” Then came the ever-expanding definition of that enemy, until every single person in the entirety of the state found him or herself at risk of encapsulation within that insatiable and devouring net. The verdict, delivered to those deemed at fault, by those who elevated themselves to the simultaneously held

positions of judge, jury and executioner? The necessity to eradicate the victimizers, the oppressors, *in toto*, without any consideration whatsoever for reactionary niceties—such as individual innocence.

Let us note, as well: this outcome wasn't the result of the initially pristine Marxist doctrine becoming corrupt over time, but something apparent and present at the very beginning of the Soviet state itself. Solzhenitsyn cites, for example, one Martin Latsis, writing for the newspaper *Red Terror*, November 1, 1918: "We are not fighting against single individuals. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. It is not necessary during the interrogation to look for evidence proving that the accused opposed the Soviets by word or action. The first question you should ask him is what class does he belong to, what is his origin, his education and his profession. These are the questions that will determine the fate of the accused. Such is the sense and essence of red terror." It is necessary to *think* when you read such a thing, to meditate long and hard on the message. It is necessary to recognize, for example, that the writer believed that it would be better to execute ten thousand potentially innocent individuals than to allow one poisonous member of the oppressor class to remain free. It is equally necessary to *pose the question*: "Who, precisely, belonged to that hypothetical entity, 'the bourgeoisie'?" It is not as if the boundaries of such

a category are self-evident, there for the mere perceiving. They must be drawn. But where, *exactly*? And, more importantly, by whom—or by what? If it's hate inscribing the lines, instead of love, they will inevitably be drawn so that the lowest, meanest, most cruel and useless of the conceptual geographers will be justified in manifesting the greatest possible evil, and producing the greatest possible misery.

Members of the bourgeoisie? Beyond all redemption! They had to go, as a matter of course! What of their wives? Children? Even—their grandchildren? Off with their heads, too! All were incorrigibly corrupted by their class identity, and their destruction therefore ethically necessitated. How convenient, that the darkest and direst of all possible motivations could be granted the highest of moral standings! That was a true marriage of Hell and of Heaven. What values, what philosophical presumptions, truly dominated, under such circumstances? Was it desire for brotherhood, dignity, and freedom from want? Not in the least—not given the outcome. It was instead and obviously the murderous rage of hundreds of thousands of biblical Cains, each looking to torture, destroy and sacrifice their own private Abels. There is simply no other manner of accounting for the corpses.

What can be concluded in the deepest, most permanent sense, from

Solzhenitsyn's anguished *Gulag* narrative? First, we learn what is indisputable—what we all should have learned by now (what we have nonetheless failed to learn): *that the Left, like the Right, can go too far; that the Left has, in the past, gone much too far*. Second, we learn what is far more subtle and difficult— *how* and *why* that going too far occurs. We learn,

as Solzhenitsyn so profoundly insists, that the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And we learn, as well, that we all are, each of us, simultaneously oppressor and oppressed. Thus, we come to realize that the twin categories of “guilty oppressor” and “justice-seeking victim” can be made endlessly inclusive. This is not least because we all benefit unfairly (and are equally victimized) by our thrownness, our arbitrary placement in the flow of time. We all accrue undeserved and somewhat random privilege from the vagaries of our place of birth, our inequitably distributed talents, our ethnicity, race, culture and sex. We all belong to a group—some group—that has been elevated in comparative status, through no effort of our own. This is true in some manner, along some dimension of group category, for every solitary individual, except for the single most lowly of all. At some time and in some manner we all may in consequence be justly targeted as oppressors, and may all, equally, seek justice—or revenge—as victims. Even if the initiators of the revolution had,

therefore, in their most pure moments, been driven by a holy desire to lift up the downtrodden, was it not guaranteed that they would be overtaken by those motivated primarily by envy, hate and the desire to destroy as the revolution progressed?

Hence the establishment of the hungrily growing and most often fatal list of class enemies, right from the very first moments of the Communist revolution. The demolition was aimed first at the students, the religious believers and the socialists (continuing, under Stalin, with the old revolutionaries themselves), and was followed soon thereafter by the annihilation of the successful peasant farmer “kulaks.” And this appetite for destruction wasn’t of the type to be satiated with the bodies of the perpetrators themselves. As Solzhenitsyn writes, “they burned out whole nests, whole families, from the start; and they watched jealously to be sure that none of the children—fourteen, ten, even six years old—got away: to the last scrapings, all had to go down the same road, to the same common destruction.” This was driven by the perceived—even self-perceived—guilt of all. How else was it possible for the hundreds of thousands or perhaps even millions of informants, prosecutors, betrayers and unforgivably mute observers to spring so rapidly into being in the tumult of the Red Terror? Thus the doctrine of group identity inevitably ends with everyone

identified as a class enemy, an oppressor; with everyone uncleanly contaminated by bourgeois privilege, unfairly enjoying the benefits bequeathed by the vagaries of history; with everyone prosecuted, without respite, for that corruption and injustice. “No mercy for the oppressor!” And no punishment too severe for the crime of exploitation! Expiation becomes impossible because there is no individual guilt, no individual responsibility, and therefore no manner in which the crime of arbitrary birth can be individually accounted for. And all the misery that can be generated as a consequence of such an accusation is the true reason for the accusation. When everyone is guilty, all that serves justice is the punishment of everyone; when the guilt extends to the existence of the world’s misery itself, only the fatal punishment will suffice.

It is much more preferable, instead—and much more likely to preserve us all from metastasizing hells—to state forthrightly: “I am indeed thrown arbitrarily into history. I therefore choose to voluntarily shoulder the responsibility of my advantages and the burden of my disadvantages—like every other individual. I am morally bound to pay for my advantages with my responsibility. I am morally bound to accept my disadvantages as the price I pay for being. I will therefore strive not to descend into bitterness and then seek vengeance because I have less to my credit and a greater

burden to stumble forward with than others.”

Is this not *a* or even *the* essential point of difference between the West, for all its faults, and the brutal, terrible “egalitarian” systems generated by the pathological Communist doctrine? The great and good framers of the American republic were, for example, anything but utopian. They took full stock and full measure of ineradicable human imperfection. They held modest goals, derived not least from the profoundly cautious common-law tradition of England. They endeavored to establish a system the corrupt and ignorant fools we all are could not damage too fatally. That’s humility. That’s clear-headed knowledge of the limitations of human machination and good intention.

But the Communists, the revolutionaries? They aimed, grandly and admirably, at least in theory, at a much more heavenly vision—and they began their pursuit with the hypothetically straightforward and oh-so-morally-justifiable enforcement of economic equality. Wealth, however, was not so easily generated. The poor could not so simply become rich. But the riches of those who had anything more than the greatest pauper (no matter how pitiful that “more” was)? That could be “redistributed”—or, at least, destroyed. That’s equality, too. That’s sacrifice, in the name of Heaven on Earth. And redistribution was not enough—with all its theft,

betrayal and death. Mere economic engineering was insufficient. What emerged, as well, was the overarching and truly totalitarian desire to remake man and woman, as such—the longing to restructure the human spirit in the very image of the Communist preconceptions. Attributing to themselves this divine ability, this transcendent wisdom—and with unshakable belief in the glowing but ever-receding future—the newly-minted Soviets tortured, thieved, imprisoned, lied and betrayed, all the while masking their great evil with virtue. It was Solzhenitsyn and *The Gulag Archipelago* that tore off the mask, and exposed the feral cowardice, envy, deceit, resentment, and hatred for the individual and for existence itself that pulsed beneath.

Others had made the attempt. Malcolm Muggeridge reported on the horrors of “dekulakization”—the forced collectivization of the all-too-recently successful peasantry of the Ukraine and elsewhere that preceded the horrifying famines of the 1930s. In the same decade, and in the following years, George Orwell risked his ideological commitments and his reputation to tell us all what was truly occurring in the Soviet Union in the name of egalitarianism and brotherhood. But it was Solzhenitsyn who truly shamed the radical leftists, forcing them underground (where they have festered and plotted for the last forty years, failing unforgivably to have

learned what all reasonable people should have learned from the cataclysm of the twentieth century and its egalitarian utopianism). And today, despite everything, and under their sway—almost three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the apparent collapse of Communism—we are doing everything we can to forget what Solzhenitsyn so clearly demonstrated, to our great and richly deserved peril. Why don't all our children read *The Gulag Archipelago* in our high schools, as they now do in Russia? Why don't our teachers feel compelled to read the book aloud? Did we not win the Cold War? Were the bodies not piled high enough? (How high, then, would be enough?)

Why, for example, is it still acceptable—and in polite company—to profess the philosophy of a Communist or, if not that, to at least admire the work of Marx? Why is it still acceptable to regard the Marxist doctrine as essentially accurate in its diagnosis of the hypothetical evils of the free-market, democratic West; to still consider that doctrine “progressive,” and fit for the compassionate and proper thinking person? Twenty-five million dead through internal repression in the Soviet Union (according to *The Black Book of Communism*). Sixty million dead in Mao's China (and an all-too-likely return to autocratic oppression in that country in the near future). The horrors of Cambodia's Killing Fields, with their two million corpses.

The barely animate body politic of Cuba, where people struggle even now to feed themselves. Venezuela, where it has now been made illegal to attribute a child's death in hospital to starvation. No political experiment has ever been tried so widely, with so many disparate people, in so many different countries (with such different histories) and failed so absolutely and so catastrophically. Is it mere ignorance (albeit of the most inexcusable kind) that allows today's Marxists to flaunt their continued allegiance—to present it as compassion and care? Or is it, instead, envy of the successful, in near-infinite proportions? Or something akin to hatred for mankind itself? How much proof do we need? Why do we still avert our eyes from the truth?

Perhaps we simply lack sophistication. Perhaps we just can't understand. Perhaps our tendency toward compassion is so powerfully necessary in the intimacy of our families and friendships that we cannot contemplate its limitations, its inability to scale, and its propensity to mutate into hatred of the oppressor, rather than allegiance with the oppressed. Perhaps we cannot comprehend the limitations and dangers of the utopian vision given our definite need to contemplate and to strive for a better tomorrow. We certainly don't seem to imagine, for example, that the hypothesis of some state of future perfection—for example, the truly egalitarian and permanent

brotherhood of man—can be used to justify any and all sacrifices whatsoever (the pristine and heavenly end making all conceivable means not only acceptable but morally required). There is simply no price too great to pay in pursuit of the ultimate utopia. (This is particularly true if it is someone else who foots the bill.) And it is clearly the case that we require a future toward which to orient ourselves—to provide meaning in our life, psychologically speaking. It is for that reason we see the same need expressed collectively, on a much larger scale, in the Judeo-Christian vision of the Promised Land, and the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. And it is also clearly the case that sacrifice is necessary to bring that desired end state into being. That's the discovery of the future itself: the necessity to forego instantaneous gratification in the present, to delay, to bargain with fate so that the future can be better; twinned with the necessity to let go, to burn off, to separate wheat from chaff, and to sacrifice what is presently unworthy, so that tomorrow can be better than today. But limits need to be placed around who or what is deemed dispensable.

And it is exactly the necessity for interminable sacrifice that constitutes the terrible counterpart of the utopian vision. "Heaven is worth any price"—but who pays? Christianity solved that problem by insisting on the sacrifice of the self; insisting that the suffering and malevolence of the

world is the responsibility of each individual; insisting that each of us sacrifice what is unworthy and unnecessary and resentful and deadly in our characters (despite the pain of such sacrifice) so that we could stumble properly uphill under our respective and voluntarily-shouldered existential burdens. But it was and is the opinion of the materialist utopians that someone else be sacrificed, so that Heaven itself might be attained; some perpetrator, or victimizer, or oppressor, or member of a privileged group. A cynic might be forgiven, in consequence, for asking: “Is it the City of God that is in fact the aim? Or is the true aim the desire to make a burning sacrificial pyre of everyone and everything, and the hypothesis of the coming brotherhood of man merely the cover story, the camouflage?” Perhaps it is precisely the horror that is the point, and not the utopia. It is far from obvious in such situations just what is horse and what is cart. It is precisely in the aftermath of the death of 100 million people or more that such dark questions must be asked. And we should also note that the utopian vision, dressed as it is inevitably in compassion, is a temptation particularly difficult to resist, and may therefore offer a particularly subtle and insidious justification for mayhem.

Here’s some thoughts—no, some facts. Every social system produces inequality, at present, and every social system has done so, since the

beginning of time. The poor have been with us—and will be with us—always. Analysis of the content of individual Paleolithic gravesites provides evidence for the existence of substantive variance in the distribution of ability, privilege, and wealth, even in our distant past. The more illustrious of our ancestors were buried with great possessions, hoards of precious metals, weaponry, jewelry, and costuming. The majority, however, struggled through their lives, and were buried with nothing. Inequality is the iron rule, even among animals, with their intense competition for quality living space and reproductive opportunity—even among plants, and cities—even among the stellar lights that dot the cosmos themselves, where a minority of privileged and oppressive heavenly bodies contain the mass of thousands, millions or even billions of average, dispossessed planets. Inequality is the deepest of problems, built into the structure of reality itself, and will not be solved by the presumptuous, ideology-inspired retooling of the rare free, stable and productive democracies of the world. The only systems that have produced some modicum of wealth, along with the inevitable inequality and its attendant suffering, are those that evolved in the West, with their roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition; precisely those systems that emphasize above all the essential dignity, divinity and ultimate responsibility of the individual. In consequence, any attempt to attribute the existence of

inequality to the functioning of the productive institutions we have managed to create and protect so recently in what is still accurately regarded as the Free World will hurt those who are weakest and most vulnerable first. The radicals who conflate the activities of the West with the oppression of the downtrodden therefore do nothing to aid those whom they purport to prize and plenty to harm them. The claims they make to act under the inspiration of pure compassion must therefore come to be regarded with the deepest suspicion—not least by those who dare to make such claims themselves.

The dangers of the utopian vision have been laid bare, even if the reasons those dangers exist have not yet been fully and acceptably articulated. If there was any excuse to be a Marxist in 1917 (and both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche prophesied well before then that there would be hell to pay for that doctrine) there is absolutely and finally no excuse now. And we know that mostly because of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and *The Gulag Archipelago*. Thank Heaven for that great author's outrage, courage, and unquenchable thirst for justice and truth. It was Solzhenitsyn who warned us that the catastrophes of the Soviet state were inextricably and causally linked to the deceitful blandishments of the Marxist utopian vision. It was Solzhenitsyn who carefully documented the price paid in suffering for the dreadful

communist experiment, and who distilled from that suffering the wisdom we must all heed so that such catastrophe does not visit us again. Perhaps we could take from his writing the humility that would allow us to understand that our mere good intentions are not sufficient to make us good men and women. Perhaps we could come to understand that such intentions are instead all too often the consequence of our unpardonable historical ignorance, our utter willful blindness, and our voracious hidden appetite for vengeance, terror and destruction. Perhaps we could come to remember and to learn from the intolerable trials endured by all those who passed through the fiery chambers of the Marxist collectivist ideology. Perhaps we could derive from that remembering and learning the wisdom necessary to take personal responsibility for the suffering and malevolence that still so terribly and unforgivably characterizes the world. We have been provided with the means to transform ourselves in due humility by the literary and moral genius of this great Russian author. We should all pray most devoutly to whatever deity guides us implicitly or explicitly for the desire and the will to learn from what we have been offered. May God Himself eternally fail to forgive us if in the painstakingly-revealed aftermath of such bloodshed, torture and anguish we remain stiff-necked, incautious, and unchanged.

Jordan B. Peterson 2018

Foreword to the Abridgment

If it were possible for any nation to fathom another people's bitter experience through a book, how much easier its future fate would become and how many calamities and mistakes it could avoid. But it is very difficult. There always is this fallacious belief: "It would not be the same here; here such things are impossible."

Alas, all the evil of the twentieth century is possible everywhere on earth. Yet I have not given up all hope that human beings and nations may be able, in spite of all, to learn from the experience of other people without having to live through it personally. Therefore, I gratefully accepted Professor Ericson's suggestion to create a one-volume abridgment of my three-volume work, *The Gulag Archipelago*, in order to facilitate its reading for those who do not have much time in this hectic century of ours. I thank Professor Ericson for his generous initiative as well as for the tactfulness, the literary taste, and the understanding of Western readers which he displayed during the work on the abridgment.

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December 1983

Introduction

In 1994, after twenty years of forced exile in the West, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn returned to Russia. At one town meeting held on his trans-Siberian whistle-stop tour to reacquaint himself with his homeland, he was confronted by this rebuke: “It is you and your writing that started it all and brought our country to the verge of collapse and devastation. Russia doesn’t need you. So ... go back to your blessed America.” Solzhenitsyn instantly replied that to his dying day he would keep fighting against the evil ideology that was capable of slaying one-third of his country’s population. The meeting erupted in applause.

That sort of exchange was unimaginable when the present abridgment of *The Gulag Archipelago* first appeared in 1985. Almost no one expected then that within a few years the Soviet Union would collapse—and almost in a day, like the legendary one-horse shay. Yet now the dramatic events that put the closing punctuation mark on the Soviet parenthesis in Russian history have also, we may say, brought an end to what the great Russian poet Anna Akhmatova called “The True Twentieth Century.” This foreshortened century, running from 1914–1917 to 1989–1991, was the era when utopian dreams rooted in Enlightenment optimism came to rely on brute force to make ideological schemes prevail.

The twentieth century has proven, in quantitative terms at least, the most murderous in human history, as governments killed their subjects at record rates. For decades the word *Holocaust* served as shorthand for modern man's inhumanity to man. Then one lone man added a second such term, *gulag*, which now appears in dictionaries as a common noun.

Solzhenitsyn was one of the precious few who did anticipate the demise of the Soviet experiment, and he thought his book would help: "Oh, yes, *Gulag* was destined to affect the course of history, I was sure of that." On one of his darkest days, February 12, 1974, the day before he was forced into exile, and precisely because *Gulag* had appeared in the West, he mused, "You Bolsheviks are finished—there are no two ways about it."

What satisfaction he felt, then, when some early reviews, such as one from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, a leading German newspaper, caught his intentions: "The time may come when we date the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet system from the appearance of *Gulag*." American diplomat and scholar George F. Kennan hailed the work as "the greatest and most powerful single indictment of a political regime ever to be leveled in modern times," one sure to stick in "the craw of the Soviet propaganda machine ... with increasing discomfort, until it has done its work."

Solzhenitsyn has proven prescient on other matters as well. Not only did

he reiterate, in the teeth of the prevailing opinion of Western specialists on Soviet affairs, that he was “absolutely convinced that Communism will go”; he also insisted most resolutely, and against all seeming reason, that he expected to be reunited with his beloved Russia: “In a strange way, I not only hope, I am inwardly convinced that I shall go back.... I mean my physical return, not just my books. And that contradicts all rationality.” His improbable prerequisites were that his citizenship be restored, that the charge of treason against him be dropped, and that all his books be published in his homeland. After his prophecies were fulfilled, a friend of his reminisced, “It seemed crazy to me at the time, but it was a real conviction, a poet’s knowledge. He *sees*. The man *sees*.”

However historians ultimately apportion the credit for ending the Cold War, Solzhenitsyn indubitably played a part in bringing the Soviet edifice down to rubble. His writings delegitimized Communism in his homeland and discredited it abroad. He was much too modest in depicting himself as a little calf foolishly butting a mighty oak and thinking this could bring it down. As David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker*, declares, “In terms of the effect he has had on history, Solzhenitsyn is the dominant writer of this century. Who else compares? Orwell? Koestler?” Remnick concludes that “to some extent, you have to credit the literary works of Aleksandr

Solzhenitsyn with helping to bring down the last empire on earth.”

It might be supposed that if Solzhenitsyn won his argument with history—or even precisely because he did win it—his relevance is now over. But that would be to presuppose that we have successfully come to terms with the twentieth century and have learned its lessons well. Unfortunately, if understandably, civilized society, after the brief euphoria of 1989–1991, has generally averted its gaze from the dreadful record. As one former denizen of the gulag, Lev Razgon, put it, “People are tired of the past.”

A review of Solzhenitsyn’s record will highlight the historical impact of two of his books. When *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* appeared in

1962, the world’s attention was drawn to the cruelty of the Soviet gulag. At a stroke, a hitherto-unknown high school teacher of mathematics and physics was catapulted into newspaper headlines around the globe. In retrospect, that novella can be seen as the first crack in the Berlin Wall.

From the platform of fame, the author could launch *The Gulag Archipelago*.

And it now stands as the indispensable text revealing the distinctive character of the age. Through herculean research efforts into Soviet atrocities, Solzhenitsyn has sketched the panorama and provided many details. Other witnesses and scholars have answered his call to fill in blank spots in the picture, and the literature of the gulag continues to be written.

The recently published *Black Book of Communism*, with its global analysis of Communism's crimes and repressions, has put a frame around the unfinished picture—a black border, to be sure.

Among the gaping blank spots that remain, we have yet to determine roughly how many politically induced deaths the Soviet regime inflicted.

Solzhenitsyn publicizes a demographer's estimate of some 60 million.

Aleksandr Yakovlev, a high official in the Gorbachev regime and now chairman of Russia's Commission for the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repression, estimates the number at perhaps 35 million. Also, he admits that his generation “allowed those monsters Lenin and Stalin to kill us” and that it is “high time” for him and others “to repent, to apologize to those who survived, [and] to kneel before the millions who were shot.”

Yakovlev's penitential posture accords with Solzhenitsyn's moral vision.

A key passage in *Gulag* proclaims, “So let the reader who expects this book to be a political exposé slam its covers shut right now.” The passage proceeds to specify that moral matters are fundamental, because “the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.” Given the nature of the Soviet experiment, the political dimension of life is never far from Solzhenitsyn's mind. But he always approaches politics in moral terms. Anyone, then, who views human reality primarily through the prism

of politics will misread *Gulag*. Elsewhere, Solzhenitsyn complains about those who “always insist on regarding me in political terms ... completely missing the point that this is not my framework, not my task, and not my dimension.” Far from limiting himself to politics, he attends primarily to “the timeless essence of humanity,” to those “fixed universal concepts called good and justice.”

To read *Gulag* through a moral lens is to understand that government power can perpetrate all sorts of atrocities upon human beings, body and soul, but it can never fully succeed in quenching the human spirit. Yes, some people will submit and will die spiritually. But others, like Ivan Denisovich, will endure and prevail. Despite all of the indignities inflicted upon them, their innate human dignity will remain intact. In this sense, *total*itarianism must always fail.

In Solzhenitsyn’s case, the moral vision grows organically from a religious commitment. Passages in *Gulag* describe his move from Marx to Christ during his years of incarceration, a change of heart amplified in subsequent writings. Because religious faith is his bedrock conviction, the greatest impediment to appreciating and appropriating Solzhenitsyn has been the error of listening to his sad music of Russia with ears attuned solely to secular wavelengths.

Many Western admirers, who in the early years of Solzhenitsyn's fame had lionized him as an anti-totalitarian freedom fighter, reacted with shock and dismay when in 1972 he publicized his Christian faith. The static interfering with his Western reception increased when the now exiled writer, in speaking to Western audiences about the West, voiced moral criticism in tones many judged to be overly harsh. Intellectuals and journalists developed a negative consensus about him, which was memorably captured by American critic Jeri Laber's complaint in 1974 that "he is not the 'liberal' that we would like him to be." That consensus hardened over the following two decades. By the 1990s the Western response to Solzhenitsyn could be called schizophrenic. On one hand, the misrepresentations encased within the negative consensus caused David Remnick to lament that "when Solzhenitsyn's name comes up now it is more often than not as a freak, a monarchist, an anti-Semite, a crank, a has-been, not as a hero." On the other hand, Solzhenitsyn was widely reported to be "the most admired living Russian" by a Western press that couldn't quite fathom why.

Now that the abridged version of *The Gulag Archipelago* returns to print—the 25–30 percent of it that survived my knife—readers can form their judgments afresh. The usual first reaction to any act of abridgment is that it

is a bad business, almost a desecration. Yet here is a book that has been translated into thirty-five languages and has sold more than 30 million copies, nearly three million in the United States alone, and nonetheless remains more known about than known. On the many occasions when I have lectured on Solzhenitsyn, members of the audience have told me that they have read the first hundred or so pages of Volume I but never, despite good intentions, returned to read the rest.

We can identify three obstacles that deflect readers. First, the work is very long—more than eighteen hundred pages. Second, some parts depend upon more knowledge of Russian and Soviet history than all but a few Western readers have. Third, the many accumulated horror stories engender a sense of depression that overwhelms all but the most persevering readers. Therefore, my work of abridgment has been governed by several specifiable principles and procedures. First and foremost, I have kept in mind a Western readership, one with only a limited knowledge of Russian history. Of course, it is impossible to take the “Russianness” out of this book, and I would not want to do so if I could; the work is, after all, written by a Russian and primarily for Russians. But the sections that highlight universal moral values preponderate in this volume. Second, I have retained the seven-part structure of the original, which actually can be perceived

more clearly in a one-volume abridgment than in its three-volume entirety. I have sought to provide a sense of the whole work and its developing argument, not merely a series of disconnected excerpts. Third, I have resisted the urge to explain and comment. The few interpolated words of my own are strictly transitional. Fourth, I have tried to leave as few marks of excision as possible. Wherever possible, I have given no indication that passages have been deleted. Where the stitching is obvious, I have resorted to the semi-apology of inserting ellipsis points. For the most part, I hope that, without consulting the original, it is not apparent where the stitching occurred. Chapters that have been deleted entirely are summarized in a sentence or two. The same is true of the few chapters which are cut so deeply that the sense of them cannot be gleaned from the remaining passages. At Solzhenitsyn's own suggestion, I have eliminated much of his personal story, though parts of it I treasure too much to drop.

In sum, I have striven for maximum readability. This abridged text is designed for the general reader, not for the scholar. The full text, including footnotes and explanatory glosses, remains available for all who wish to consult it.

Surprisingly, this abridgment contains several short passages that have still not appeared in translations of the work as a whole, though they do

appear in the author's collected works in Russian. We now know the fascinating story of how Solzhenitsyn composed *The Gulag Archipelago*—on the run and largely while at his Hiding Place in Estonia—from *Invisible Allies*, his tribute to his co-workers in the literary underground. This material will eventually appear in its proper place as part of an augmented edition of his autobiographical *The Oak and the Calf*. Just as he “lightened” that work by holding parts out, so he initially withheld parts of *Gulag*. Such was the nature of the clandestine literature of the Soviet gulag.

The one obstacle that an abridgment should not try too hard to resolve is the cumulative effect of unrelieved horror. Solzhenitsyn knows what he is up against. Does it seem, he asks at various times, that I am repeating myself? It is the gulag, he explains, that keeps repeating itself. Anyone who stays the course, however, will discover that the final note of this work, as of virtually all his works, is the note of hope. So if even the abridged version is too long for some readers, they should skip ahead to such chapters as “The Ascent” and “The Forty Days of Kengir” to discover why Solzhenitsyn is hopeful. There they will discover why, despite the common misimpression of him as a Jeremiah figure, he considers himself “an unshakable optimist.” As he wrote to me in a letter of advice about my work of abridging, “the main goal, the main sense of *Archipelago* [is] a

moral uplifting and *catharsis*” (emphasis his).

I must add that the author gave me considerably more help on this project than I ever could have hoped for. I deeply appreciate his many personal kindnesses. Any errors of omission or commission are mine alone.

Solzhenitsyn once told me he thought that in the long run he would be best remembered in the West through this abridgment of *The Gulag Archipelago*. Perhaps one who has been so right so often about so much will turn out to be right about this hope, too.

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In 1949 some friends and I came upon a noteworthy news item in *Nature*, a magazine of the Academy of Sciences. It reported in tiny type that in the course of excavations on the Kolyma River a subterranean ice lens had been discovered which was actually a frozen stream—and in it were found frozen specimens of prehistoric fauna some tens of thousands of years old.

Whether fish or salamander, these were preserved in so fresh a state, the scientific correspondent reported, that those present immediately broke open the ice encasing the specimens and devoured them *with relish* on the

spot.

The magazine no doubt astonished its small audience with the news of how successfully the flesh of fish could be kept fresh in a frozen state. But few, indeed, among its readers were able to decipher the genuine and heroic meaning of this incautious report.

As for us, however—we understood instantly. We could picture the entire scene right down to the smallest details: how those present broke up the ice in frenzied haste; how, flouting the higher claims of ichthyology and elbowing each other to be first, they tore off chunks of the prehistoric flesh and hauled them over to the bonfire to thaw them out and bolt them down. We understood because we ourselves were the same kind of people as *those present* at that event. We, too, were from that powerful tribe of *zeks*, unique on the face of the earth, the only people who could devour prehistoric salamander with *relish*.

And the Kolyma was the greatest and most famous island, the pole of ferocity of that amazing country of *Gulag* which, though scattered in an Archipelago geographically, was, in the psychological sense, fused into a continent—an almost invisible, almost imperceptible country inhabited by the zek people.

And this Archipelago crisscrossed and patterned that other country within

which it was located, like a gigantic patchwork, cutting into its cities, hovering over its streets. Yet there were many who did not even guess at its presence and many, many others who had heard something vague. And only those who had been there knew the whole truth.

But, as though stricken dumb on the islands of the Archipelago, they kept their silence.

By an unexpected turn of our history, a bit of the truth, an insignificant part of the whole, was allowed out in the open. But those same hands which once screwed tight our handcuffs now hold out their palms in reconciliation: “No, don’t! Don’t dig up the past! Dwell on the past and you’ll lose an eye.”

But the proverb goes on to say: “Forget the past and you’ll lose both eyes.”

Decades go by, and the scars and sores of the past are healing over for good. In the course of this period some of the islands of the Archipelago have shuddered and dissolved and the polar sea of oblivion rolls over them. And someday in the future, this Archipelago, its air, and the bones of its inhabitants, frozen in a lens of ice, will be discovered by our descendants like some improbable salamander.

I would not be so bold as to try to write the history of the Archipelago. I

have never had the chance to read the documents. And, in fact, will anyone ever have the chance to read them? Those who do not wish to *recall* have already had enough time—and will have more—to destroy all the documents, down to the very last one.

I have absorbed into myself my own eleven years there not as something shameful nor as a nightmare to be cursed: I have come almost to love that monstrous world, and now, by a happy turn of events, I have also been entrusted with many recent reports and letters. So perhaps I shall be able to give some account of the bones and flesh of that salamander—which, incidentally, is still alive.

PART I

The Prison Industry



Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn—in the army



... in detention



... after his release from camp

Chapter 1