

# Alexander Solzhenitsyn

with Mikhail Agursk  
Evgeny Barabanov, Vadim B  
F. Korsakov, and Igor Shafarevich

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## From Under the Rubble



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FROM UNDER THE RUBBLE

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by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Mikhail Agursky,  
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F. Korsakov, and Igor Shafarevich

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With an introduction by  
Max Hayward



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## Introduction

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MAX HAYWARD

This collection of eleven essays edited by Solzhenitsyn (who wrote three of the essays as well) opens with a brief foreword indicating that its purpose is to stir debate, after over half a century of enforced silence, on matters of fundamental principle concerning the present state of Russia. The intention is to suggest a diagnosis of the evils and difficulties that beset the country, and to point to possible long-range solutions, if only tentative ones. Although the issues are discussed primarily in Russian terms, the authors show themselves to be not uninformed about the outside world and fully conscious that the problems of the planet now override those of any one part of it.

*From Under the Rubble* has a forerunner in prerevolutionary Russia, namely, a famous collection of articles by a group of prominent scholars, writers and thinkers which was published in 1909 under the title *Landmarks (Vekhi)*. The contributors included the religious philosophers Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov and Semyon Frank, the legal theorist B. A. Kistyakovsky, the literary critic M. Gershenzon, and the eminent economist, publicist and liberal politician Peter Struve. All of them had grown up in the climate of populist socialism and Marxism of the last decades of the



## INTRODUCTION

nineteenth century, and had revolted against it, rejecting the whole ethos of the Russian radical intelligentsia of the 1860s, which had prepared the ground for it. Berdyayev and Bulgakov were ex-Marxists, and Struve had indeed drafted the manifesto of the Russian Social Democratic party at its founding congress in 1898. (By a nice irony, it is his grandson, Nikita Struve, who now publishes Solzhenitsyn's work in Russian in Paris.)

The contributors to *Landmarks* took a searching look at Russian society, and in particular at the intelligentsia, which they held responsible for Russia's failure to find proper means of confronting the country's multifarious problems. The main attack was against the narrowness of outlook and sectarianism that had led the majority of Russian intellectuals to seek solutions in an uncritical adaptation of the West European enlightenment in its nineteenth-century forms of positivism, atheist materialism, "scientific socialism," and so on. The authors called for a return to traditional spiritual values — which for most of them meant those enshrined in Christian teaching — as a necessary condition for a regeneration of the country's intellectual, cultural and social life. All of them were united — as Gershenzon wrote in his preface to the volume — by their "recognition of the primacy both in theory and in practice of spiritual life over the outward forms of society, in the sense that the inner life of the individual . . . and not the self-sufficing elements of some political order is the only solid basis for every social structure."<sup>1</sup>

*Landmarks* caused a tremendous stir at the time of its publication, provoking outrage in the ranks of the intelligentsia. Lenin, for example, denounced it as "an encyclopedia of liberal apostasy." The Bolsheviks' seizure of power in October 1917 was soon to overwhelm the authors of *Landmarks* and

1. As quoted in Leonard Schapiro's article on *Landmarks*: "The Vekhi Group and the Mystique of Revolution" in the *Slavonic and East European Review*, December 1955. For an excellent introduction to the wider context of the Russian nineteenth-century intellectual tradition, in which it is important to view both *Landmarks* and *From Under the Rubble*, see the same author's *Rationalism and Nationalism in Russian Nineteenth Century Political Thought*, Yale University Press, 1967.



everything they represented, but the volume remained influential. Although it was under a strict ban in Soviet Russia, constant official attacks on it in the Stalin era — particularly during the cultural purges of 1947–1948 — served to keep its memory alive among Soviet intellectuals and even, through highly selective quotation, gave some idea of its contents.

Before they were dispersed in emigration, the *Landmarks* authors, now joined by several others, managed to have printed in the Bolshevik-controlled Moscow of 1918 a second volume of essays under the title *De Profundis*. In this they spoke of the year-old October revolution as the fulfillment of their forebodings in *Landmarks* about the inevitable consequences of the intelligentsia's thirst for revolution. As Berdyayev put it in his contribution, Russia had now been seized by evil spirits like those in Gogol's nightmarish tales, or by the "possessed" of Dostoyevsky's prophetic imagination. It was not simply a change of regime, but a spiritual disaster, a self-willed descent into the abyss. *De Profundis* was confiscated and banned almost immediately. Only two copies survived in the West and it was virtually unknown and unobtainable until it was reprinted in Paris in 1967. This sequel to *Landmarks* must clearly have made a profound impression on Solzhenitsyn: the Russian title of *From Under the Rubble* (*Iz pod glyb*) is a phonetic echo of the Russian words for *De Profundis* (*Iz glubiny*).<sup>2</sup>

By modeling their collection of essays on *Landmarks*, Solzhenitsyn and his associates demonstrate their conviction that in order to talk meaningfully about present-day Russia it is essential to cross back over the intellectual void of the last sixty years and resume a tradition in Russian thought which is antithetical to the predominant one of the old revolutionary intelligentsia, particularly as it developed in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The publication of this joint profession of faith by a great Russian writer now living in enforced exile, and a group of

2. It is hard to give a precise rendering of the title in English. The implication is of people speaking from beneath stone blocks or masses of earth or debris that have buried them alive — see Solzhenitsyn's foreword.

## INTRODUCTION

intellectuals still inside the country — including one of its leading mathematicians — is an eloquent response to the recent tactics of the Soviet government in its efforts to stifle dissent. The indiscriminate use of prison and the madhouse, which is still by no means in abeyance, has been supplemented by the ostensibly more subtle policy of selective banishment abroad. The hope evidently is that if some of the more powerful voices that speak “from under the rubble” are removed from the scene, those remaining behind will be demoralized and eventually silenced.

But the authors of *From Under the Rubble* demonstrate that the voices of dissent will not so easily be stilled. The central premise of the collection is that the problems of the modern world, Soviet as well as Western, can no longer be solved on the political plane. Instead, the quest for solutions must begin on the ethical level. Since their approach is spiritual in nature, the authors reject all forms of physical violence and compulsion. Their goal is to bring about in Russia a moral revolution. As they see it, the political revolutionary has always said: “Let us go and kill our enemies and then everything will be fine.” But as moral revolutionaries the authors are saying, in effect, “Let us put ourselves in danger. Perhaps we shall be killed. But as a result of our acts, there may be an improvement in the life of the nation.”

The authors believe that new and better relations among people can only come about if they embrace a new life of repentance and self-restraint. This can happen among nations as well as among individuals, for the authors are convinced that the concept of the nation is not an anachronism, but that it still has a relevant intrinsic value. Their idea is perhaps best summed up by Solzhenitsyn himself. Upon the receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970, he wrote: “Nations are the wealth of mankind, its collective personalities. The very least of them wears its own special colors and bears within itself a special facet of divine intention.”

## Foreword

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The universal suppression of thought leads not to its extinction, but to distortion, ignorance and the mutual incomprehension of compatriots and contemporaries.

For many decades now not a single question, not a single major event in our life has been freely and comprehensively discussed, so that a true appreciation of it could be arrived at and solutions found. Everything was suppressed, everything was left to molder in unintelligible chaos, without thought for the past and consequently for the future either. Meanwhile more and more events accumulated and piled up in such crushing heaps that neither inclination nor strength was left to try and sort them out.

And now people are approaching from outside and, heedlessly and irresponsibly, without let or hindrance, are making all sorts of arbitrary judgments about our recent history and the possibilities of our people. We start to protest and at once bog down in polemics, as a result of which we are in danger of missing the wood for the trees. For the voices destined to express what was known at the appropriate time fell prematurely silent, the documents perished, and the gaze of the outside researcher cannot penetrate into those dark depths beneath the piles of unsorted rubbish.

## **FOREWORD**

It is from out of those dank and dark depths, from under the rubble, that we are now putting forth our first feeble shoots. If we wait for history to present us with freedom and other precious gifts, we risk waiting in vain. History is us — and there is no alternative but to shoulder the burden of what we so passionately desire and bear it out of the depths.

A.S.



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# FROM UNDER THE RUBBLE

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# As Breathing and Consciousness Return

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ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN

(Apropos of A. D. Sakharov's treatise "Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom.")<sup>1</sup>

*This article, written four years ago, was not issued as samizdat,<sup>2</sup> but shown only to A. D. Sakharov himself. As samizdat it was needed more at that time than now, since it related directly to this well-known treatise. Since then Sakharov's views and practical proposals have traveled a long way, so that today the article has very little relevance to him, and is not a polemic with him.*

*"Therefore it's too late," I hear people objecting. If only it were. In half a century we have not succeeded in calling anything by its right name or thinking anything through, and fifty years from now we shall still be catching up. Because all that has so far appeared in print is quite futile. Here, as elsewhere, such a time lag is a normal feature of Russian life since the revolution.*

*But it is not too late because in our country a massive section of educated society is still stuck fast in the way of think-*

1. See Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov, *Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom*, trans. the *New York Times* (New York: Norton, 1968).—TRANS.

2. *Samizdat* is a recent Russian coinage meaning literally "self-publishing." It refers to poems, essays, stories, articles, and so on, that are typed out and passed from hand to hand to evade the censorship.—TRANS.

## AS BREATHING AND CONSCIOUSNESS RETURN

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*ing which Sakharov has passed through and left behind. And it is not too late for another reason, namely, that several groups in the West apparently share the same hopes, illusions and delusions.*

### ONE

The transition from free speech to enforced silence is no doubt painful. What torment for a living society, used to thinking for itself, to lose from some decreed date the right to express itself in print and in public, to bite back its words year in and year out, in friendly conversation and even under the family roof.

But the way back, which our country will soon face — the return of breathing and consciousness, the transition from silence to free speech — will also prove difficult and slow, and just as painful, because of the gulf of utter incomprehension which will suddenly yawn between fellow-countrymen, even those of the same generation and same place of origin, even members of the same close circle.

For decades, while we were silent, our thoughts straggled in all possible and impossible directions, lost touch with each other, never learned to know each other, ceased to check and correct each other. While the stereotypes of required thought, or rather of dictated opinion, dinned into us daily from the electrified gullets of radio, endlessly reproduced in thousands of newspapers as like as peas, condensed into weekly surveys for political study groups, have made mental cripples of us and left very few minds undamaged.

Powerful and daring minds are now beginning to struggle upright, to fight their way out from under heaps of antiquated rubbish. But even they still bear all the cruel marks of the branding iron, they are still cramped by the shackles into which they were forced half-grown. And because we are intellectually isolated from each other, they have no one to measure themselves against.

As for the rest of us, we have so shriveled in the decades of

falsehood, thirsted so long in vain for the refreshing drops of truth, that as soon as they fall upon our faces we tremble with joy. "At last!" we cry, and we forgive the dust-laden whirlwind which has blown up with them, and the radioactive fallout which they conceal. We so rejoice in every little word of truth, so utterly suppressed until recent years, that we forgive those who first voice it for us all their near misses, all their inexactitudes, even a portion of error greater than the portion of truth, simply because "something at least, something at last has been said!"

All this we experienced as we read Academician Sakharov's article and listened to comments on it at home and from abroad. Our hearts beat faster as we realized that at last someone had broken out of the deep, untroubled, cozy torpor in which Soviet scientists get on with their scientific work, are rewarded with a life of plenty and pay for it by keeping their thoughts at the level of their test tubes. It was a liberating joy to realize that Western atomic scientists are not the only ones who feel pangs of conscience — that a conscience is awakening among our own scientists too.

This in itself makes Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov's fearless public statement an important event in modern Russian history.

The work finds its way to our hearts above all because of the honesty of its judgments. Many events and phenomena are called by the names which we all use in the secrecy of our minds but are too cowardly to speak aloud. Stalin's regime is numbered among the "demagogic, hypocritical, monstrously cruel police regimes"; we are told that in comparison with Hitlerism, Stalinism "wore a much more cunning disguise of hypocrisy and demagoguery" because it relied on "Socialist ideology as a convenient screen." We are reminded of the "predatory procurements" of agricultural produce and the "reduction of the peasantry to a condition almost of serfdom."

True, all this is said of the past, but the present day is not forgotten. There is "great material inequality between town and country," "40 percent of our country's population finds