

Editorial

The USSR is no longer a monolith in the realm of ideas. Under Stalin Soviet citizens were forced to conform ideologically through the fear engendered by the threat of death or many years in a labour camp. That fear and threat have now been considerably reduced by the de-stalinization policy of the Khrushchev era. Today the deterrents against ideas which run counter to the Party's ideology are nevertheless still great: to be pronounced mentally unbalanced and imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital is probably the worst of these deterrents. And yet ideas and controversies are born and flourish amongst the Intelligentsia despite the difficulties of communication.

The ideas of the neo-slavophiles form an important part of Soviet intellectual life. Indeed Philip Walters (see his article "A New Creed for Russians?" pp. 20-31) claims that neo-slavophilism "may well supplant a moribund Marxism-Leninism". Andrei Sakharov and Roy Medvedev, however, represent positions which are strongly opposed to the Russian nationalism of the neo-slavophiles. This disagreement has been focused in the so-called "Solzhenitsyn-Sakharov controversy" which centred on Solzhenitsyn's *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*. This *Letter* provoked a variety of reactions. Andrei Sakharov and Roy Medvedev attacked Solzhenitsyn's religious nationalism; Vladimir Osipov (see this issue of *RCL* pp. 28-29) and Mikhail Agursky supported him.

Solzhenitsyn stresses the importance of man's inner life whereas both Sakharov and Medvedev concentrate on external reform. Solzhenitsyn writes in his *Letter*: "The need for *inner* development is incomparably more important for us, as a people, than the need for *external* expansion of power." Rather than trying to reach the moon, Russians would be more enriched by a slower, more stable rhythm of life which is rooted in Russian soil. Solzhenitsyn has a strong sense of Russia's historical development and does not think that the USSR is ready politically for democratic government. He advocates an authoritarian system which is not based on lies and illegality but on the spiritual and moral foundations of the Orthodox Church. Christianity alone he considers can provide

man with inner wholeness and, since in his view every aspect of life is linked with the spiritual state of a people, Christianity alone can be the basis for a healthy polity: "I myself do not see today any other living spiritual force except the Christian one, which could take on the spiritual healing of Russia."

Andrei Sakharov criticizes Solzhenitsyn's Russian nationalism and advocates a democratic system of government, convergence with the West and scientific-technological progress. Roy Medvedev, an exponent of Marxism "with a human face", bases his vision for the future on the development of so-called "socialist democracy" in the USSR. He recommends free elections, de-centralization of the administration and the growth of legal opposition in the form of a Socialist Party which would inject new life into the Communist Party.

The "Solzhenitsyn-Sakharov controversy" is based on a divergence of political and economic views. (Medvedev also disagrees ideologically with Solzhenitsyn.) Nevertheless the values which Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov hold in common override this divergence: both men are involved in "the struggle for human dignity in today's tragic world" (Sakharov's words); both express deep compassion for their fellow men; both demand civil and human rights – freedom of conscience, speech, movement, press – and both struggle for the rule of law; both advocate gradual evolutionary change rather than a violent social upheaval.

Solzhenitsyn is a "liberal" neo-slavophil. But as Philip Walters shows in his article, there are also some sinister elements within neo-slavophilism, namely an ugly form of chauvinistic nationalism and antisemitism. Shimanov's idea of an "Orthodox Party of the Soviet Union" (see pp. 24-25) based on the Communist Party's political structure, sounds ominous. Would this not be a new tyranny dressed up in ecclesiastical vestments like that proposed by the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*? Dostoevsky constantly defended the individual against any political institution or doctrine which might rob him of his free will. Despite their differences Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov too struggle against the forces which encroach upon the individual's right to make up his own mind and to share his ideas and beliefs with whomsoever he chooses.