

Monday, August 4, 2008

Hard labor after penning "[Stalin-] Man with the mustache"

Â Â Image from Library of Congress's website. Indonesia had Pramoedya Ananta Toer courageously to write truth about the nation he so loved, despite the hounding,Â harassment, and lengthy total years of imprisonment from successive dictatorships. Â Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn served a similar role in Russia, and I say Russia rather than the Soviet Union or Russian Empire, because Solzhenitsyn was very much the Russian nationalist. Â Where Pramoedya was a soft-spoken, self-effacing man who got persecuted for his carefully-penned prose, Aleksandr SolzhenitsynÂ was blunt, opinionated and insistent, and a masterful writer. His eight-year prison sentence starting at the end of World War II followed his penning a letter to a friend referencing Stalin as the "man with a mustache."Â Stalin ruled, imprisoned, rang up Soviet-bloc dictators in the middle of the night, and shot people before the days of public relations advisors who urge leaders to gain some popularity by poking some fun at themselves. Â Solzhenitsyn's imprisonment in the Gulag that is masterfully fictionalized in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* followed his vocal dismissiveness towards a prison superior at a Club Fed sort of prison where scientific intellectuals worked in rather freewheelingÂ think-tank style to develop ideas and inventions for the emerging Soviet superpower. Â Solzhenitsyn lived a long life, finally realized his dream to return to and die inÂ his homeland from which he was forcibly exiled by the Brezhnev regime, and passed away on August 3. Â He was not big on democracy, decried the state of American society when in Vermont during his exile and said too few Americans are willing to die for their beliefs (and he certainly was willing to do so, himself), and believed the United States withdrew too quickly from Vietnam. In other words, he spoke his mind, as everyone should have the protected right to do, no matter how vehemently we agree or disagree with their views. Â He was for me a critical face of the struggle against government censorship by white-out, confiscation of printing presses and copiers and newsprint, coercion, co-optation, imprisonment, torture, and execution, no matter the government, whether Communist, right-wing, or our very own United States (which censors in more subtle ways than the messiness of torture and execution). Â His struggle to be free to speak his mind is a struggle that must constantly be fought and re-fought, and won and re-won. Solzhenitsyn may be physically dead, but his unyielding spirit, fight and drive for the freedom to dissent openly, directly, and without varnish must live on. Otherwise, everyone will suffer dearly. Jon Katz.Â

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news & views at 00:00