

NEWS

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AFL-CIO



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Following is the transcript of the introductory and closing remarks made by AFL-CIO President George Meany at the AFL-CIO dinner honoring Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Nobel Prize-winning novelist and Soviet dissident, in the Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington, D. C., June 30, 1975.

When we think of the historic struggles and conflicts of this century, we naturally think of famous leaders: Men who governed nations, commanded armies and inspired movements in the defense of liberty, or in the service of ideologies which have obliterated liberty.

Yet, today, in this grave hour in human history, when the forces arrayed against the free spirit of man are more powerful, more brutal and more lethal than ever before, the single figure who has raised highest the flame of liberty heads no state, commands no army, and leads no movement that our eyes can see.

But there is a movement -- a hidden movement of human beings who have no offices and have no headquarters, who are not represented in the great halls where nations meet, who every day risk or suffer more for the right to speak, to think and to be themselves than any of us here are likely to risk in our entire lifetime.

Where are the members of this invisible movement? As we prepare tonight to honor the presence of one of them among us, let us give some thought to the rest: To the millions who are trapped in Soviet slave labor camps; to the countless thousands drugged and straitjacketed in so-called "insane asylums"; to the multitudes of voiceless workers who slave in the factories of the commissars; to all those who strain for bits and pieces of truth through the jammed frequencies of forbidden broadcasts, and who record and pass outlawed thoughts from hand-to-hand in the shadows of tyranny.

But if they remain invisible to us, we can hear them now, for there has come forth from under the rubble of oppression a voice that demands to be heard; a voice that will not be denied.

We heed this voice not because it speaks for the left or the right or for any faction, but because it hurls truth and courage into the teeth of total power when it would be so much easier and more comfortable to submit and to embrace the lies by which that power lives.

What is the strength of this voice? How has it broken through to us when others have been stilled? Its strength is art.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is not a crusader. He is not a politician. He is not a general. He is an artist.

Solzhenitsyn's art illuminates the truth. It is, in a sense, subversive: Subversive of hypocrisy, subversive of delusion, subversive of the Big Lie.

No man in modern times and very few in all of history have demonstrated as dramatically as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn the power of the pen coupled with courage to free men's minds.

We need that power today desperately. We need it to teach the new and the forgetful generations in our midst what it means not to be free. Freedom is not an abstraction; neither is the absence of freedom. Solzhenitsyn has helped us to see that, thanks to his art and his courage.

Meany

-2-

His art is a unique gift. It cannot be transmitted to another. But let us pray that his courage is contagious.

We need echoes of his voice. We need to hear the echoes in the White House. We need to hear the echoes in the Congress and in the State Department and in the universities and in the media, and if you please, Mr. (U.N. Ambassador Patrick) Moynihan, in the United Nations.

The American trade union movement, from its beginnings to the present, has been dedicated to the firm unyielding belief in freedom. Freedom for all mankind, as well as for ourselves. It is in that spirit that we are honored to present our speaker of this evening.

#### CLOSING

May I express, in your name, our deep appreciation to our guest tonight for his inspiring address, for the thoughts that he left with us at a time when, God knows, the world needs to think more about human freedom. The world needs to think more about those who are losing their freedom every day.

America must, in my opinion, shape up to this challenge as the leader of the free world, because if America doesn't lead the free world, the free world, I'm afraid, has no leader.