THE REALITY OF POST-COMMUNISM

ALEXANDER ZINOVIEV

AND THE RUSSIAN TRAGEDY
When planning, shavings fall. When experimenting, disappointment can arise.

Soviet theory of evolution. Shave of the fittest.
The United States leads the West so, these days globalisation, westernisation and Americanisation are used as synonyms (cf. ibid, p. 232). This is not necessarily the case. A fierce and condescending form of cultural imperialism, the construction of the very foundations of a country’s life, of its social system, its organisation of government and its function in the world is being attacked as well as attacked. In this attack, in this opposition, the voices of the West are fairly and easily recognised. The United States, the United Kingdom, the West, the West as he defines it: the United States, Canada, Western Europe and Australia, is in the ascendant, having used democracy to achieve the results it desired. Zinoviev put the idea in their heads. The feeling that democracy produce positive results only in the West, it was stable (RT, p. 350-1). The Soviet Union had the most democratic system of education in the world (RT, p. 243). Corruption was limited, partly because so little by the way of material goods was available (RT, p. 147-7). The Soviet Union of Stalin’s time was characterised by the highest degree of social purity (ibid, p. 280).

Zinoviev’s defence of the old order treats Soviet ideology much as a mystical Roman atrocity treated the fall of the Roman Empire. “There is no possibility of being under the control of the West… only an uninterested and credulous: the system is a hybrid, uncompleted, a compromise, a hybrid system,” Zinoviev put the idea in their heads. The feeling that "for some reason the West should be opposed, but in the name of what cause? The West as he defines it: the United States, Canada, Western Europe and Australia, is in the ascendant, having used democracy to achieve the results it desired. Zinoviev put the idea in their heads. The feeling that democracy produce positive results only in the West, it was stable (RT, p. 350-1). The Soviet Union had the most democratic system of education in the world (RT, p. 243). Corruption was limited, partly because so little by the way of material goods was available (RT, p. 147-7). The Soviet Union of Stalin’s time was characterised by the highest degree of social purity (ibid, p. 280).

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In his later writings, Zinoviev does not abandon the vision of a country’s population as a human race in a state of nature. Some of his Russian critics claim, without revealing the evidence, that he is guilty of anti-Semitism. This claim appears to be nonsense. One state and, of course, first and foremost, the West itself is evolving on a certain trajectory and, in its present form, it is acquiring a certain style and momentum outside of the Soviet Union.

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OMISSIONS

Zinoviev’s late works illuminate recent and current Russian politics. But they also suggest several rather large loose ends: topics and approaches that he might have been expected to address in any account of the collapse of the old order. In the post-Soviet period, the Chinese, and perhaps the Russians, were most likely to hit the Russian market, and the Soviet Union should at least feature a few noises off. What Zinoviev gives us by way of noises off are some passing remarks about China as a surviving communist country with which Zinoviev is unlikely to team up against the West, and the generalisation that the non-western world does not stand to benefit from being “westernised”, or at least that it cannot share how it feels to have your world dismantled, and how experience forms many of the attitudes that he behind Putin’s policies.  

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this essay was not, however, to pick a fight with Zinoviev. Sadly, it is too late for that. And his defence has already prepared: “It’s a big deal to kick a dead lion”, as he said of the de-stalinisers. The late writings of his lack the disturbing clarity of his works (originally published in 1995), in AZ, Zapad (op.cit.) 2008, pp. 419–70.*

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- Page references in this article are to these later publications.

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FURTHER REFERENCES


