



BACKGROUND FILE

Homo Sovieticus tells it all

A Conversation with Alexander Zinoviev

E I have just recently returned from Soviet Khazakstan and I was struck
I rather unexpectedly by the fact that, at least in the capital city of Alma Alta, the economic situation seemed by far more favourable than in Moscow. It was not just a question of there being more food in the shops and bazars, and of the crowd in the streets being better dressed. I had the impression that the people were in actual better physical condition. The youth looked as if it had never seen hard times, whereas Moscow looks something like a postwar zone.

Alexander Zinoviev - What you saw in Alma Ata is not particular to Khazakstan but applies to most of the non-Russian republics. Outside the Soviet Union, people are convinced that the ethnic Russians exploit all the other nationalities. It is not true. On the contrary, the living conditions for ethnic Russians are the worst in the Soviet Union. After the revolution, the Soviet nationalities policy was always anti-Russian. It was one of the principles of Lenin's politics: all the nationalities had different privileges in comparison to the Russians—all of them. As a result of the effort to create party and state bureaucracies in the former colonial possessions of imperial Russia, many peoples of the other nationalities went to Moscow, and not to work as workers or peasants. They occupied privileged positions in the state apparatus, in the party apparatus, in science, in education and so on. Lenin's nationalities policy was a success because of this granting of positions to non-Russians.

The result of this is that today the Russians are the only people without their own national political and scientific organisations. While the other republics

have their Academy of Sciences and Communist party, the Russian republic has neither of the two. Russians must become members of the CPSU or of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. I can cite some examples. When I worked at the Academy of Sciences, there were about a hundred post-graduate students in my institute. Eighty of them were from the national republics. Twenty came from Russia. However, only ten of the Russians were ethnic Russians. And every non-Russian post-graduate student from the national republics had on top of the normal stipend, an additional one from its national republic. They had privileges in other respects, as well, and this applied to thousands of young men and women. Indeed, if you consider the situation at the Academy of Sciences, in writer circles and in party circles, you will always find that the ethnic Russians are a minority. In the Academy of Sciences, less than 20 per cent of the members were ethnic Russians.

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I *What was the political rationale behind such a strategy?*

Alexander Zinoviev - It is difficult to explain. Before the revolution, Russia was considered to be an imperial power that exploited other nations: a prison of peoples. To a certain extent this was true, but not completely. The Russian government had not been ethnically Russian since the days of Peter the Great. In general, the Russian nobility and elite were not ethnically Russian either. True, the central power in St. Petersburg exploited or organised the empire, but this does not mean that the Russian people were the core of this empire. The majority of Russian people were peasants, workers, small officials, soldiers and the like.

E
I *The Czar, of course, was Russian.*

Alexander Zinoviev - Yes, but only up to the reign of Peter the Great. He was the last ethnic Russian Czar; after him, all the other Russian Czars were Germans—always. Peter's wife was a German, and Catherine II was a German princess. Without going into the genealogy of the Russian imperial family, I will just say that it is an established historical fact that Peter the Great was the last Russian Czar who was truly Russian.

E
I *It is hardly disputable, however, that at the end of the nineteenth century Russia as a nation had become an important actor on the world scene.*

Alexander Zinoviev - The revolution interrupted the process you are referring to, and after the revolution Russia as a nation all but disappeared. At present,

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there are many millions of Russians, there is a Russian people, but they do not form what could be called a nation. The Russians are dispersed throughout the country. As a result of the revolution, the Russian intelligentsia was destroyed or emigrated, and in the Soviet empire it was not the ethnic Russians but rather the other nationalities who became the most active segment of people. Actually, the living standards of the ethnic Russians have always been among the lowest in the Soviet Union, perhaps three or four times lower than in Georgia or Armenia, by far lower than in Azerbaijan, and twice as low as in the Baltic republics. One could of course point out the fact that some of these republics are privileged by nature. Let us consider, for example, the situation in Georgia: an excellent climate, and therefore fruits and wine, health and vacation resorts and the like. Some republics are bound to be very rich. Yet for decades aside from these geographic advantages, there have been other special, artificial advantages, both political and cultural.

With the passing of time, however, and thanks to the historical process of social transformation that the USSR has undergone, this situation has been changing. Many other nationalities have been losing their advantages in comparison with the Russians: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, for example, have been losing their privileges

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I *Are these the Gorbachev years?*

Alexander Zinoviev - No. This was the late Stalinist period, the years immediately after World War II, when gigantic improvements were made, for example, in the field of public education. The Russian population had always been very poorly schooled. But in a matter of a few years, millions of Russians have had access to a better education so that for the first time they could compete with the other nationalities in every field: in science, in art, in literature, in music and so on. In Stalin's years everything that happened involved millions of people. There were millions of victims, but also those who were educated had to be counted by the million. The improvement, as well as the tragedy, was gigantic.

E
I *In your book of memoirs, recently published in France under the title "Confessions d'un homme en trop, you yourself always speak of the "Soviet" people, but when you refer to yourself you say "I am Russian". In this same book you write that the destruction of the Soviet empire is the necessary condition for the access of the Russian people to modern*

civilisation. This is the only point in the book where instead of speaking of the Soviet people, you mention the Russian people.

Alexander Zinoviev - This confusion between Soviet and Russian is a specifically Soviet problem. After the revolution, the Russian empire disappeared, and the Soviet Union was created in its place. This has spelled a tragic fate for the ethnic Russians. For their future, as well, there is no way out.

E *For the ethnic Russians? Do you mean they are going to pay the price of*
I *the events of today?*

Alexander Zinoviev - Yes. I believe that the Russians are doomed. They are doomed to be the scapegoat for all the difficulties of the Soviet empire. Onto the Russian people the revolution forced the consciousness of a certain historical mission, and the Russians have sacrificed their life for this great task. I am presently finishing off a small book about the crisis of communism, in which I explain the situation with the nationalities in detail and try to explain why the tendency towards disintegration in the Soviet empire is so strong at present.

E *The Soviet Union is a multi-national state, but this feature is not a*
I *consequence of communism. The Communist regime has inherited this situation. However, it could be pointed out that in the very years of the Soviet revolution, while all the remaining multi-national empires—the Austrian and the Turkish—were dissolved in the aftermath of World War I, only the Russian empire managed to survive. Could you say that the revolution saved the multi-national empire?*

Alexander Zinoviev - Yes. One could say so. There are many prejudices about Russian history and about the social structure of the Soviet Union, among other things. It would take a great deal of effort and patience to dispel them and change current opinion on this subject

From the sociological point of view, in pre-revolutionary Russia there were three social groups that shared the political power: a feudal nobility, an embryonic—but not negligible—capitalist bourgeoisie, and a state bureaucracy. The noble classes had gradually become very weak, the capitalists were not strong enough, while the state bureaucracy was very powerful. Practically, Russian history has always coincided with the history of



Don Quixote Fighting against the Puppets

the state. The Russian empire was the result neither of capitalism nor of feudalism, but the result of the state. The revolution destroyed the classes whose power was based on feudal privilege and private property—the capitalists and the nobles: yet it did not destroy the state bureaucracy. On the contrary, this class was enormously expanded and strengthened by the Soviet regime, whose very nature is one of bureaucratic power. The sociological structure of post-revolutionary society explains the apparently contradictory behaviour of the regime born of the October revolution on the question of the future of the empire. Before the revolution, the Bolsheviks had really wanted to destroy the empire. This was what their ideology prescribed. But once they had access to political power, they were forced to behave according to the laws of that power. The empire was based on military-bureaucratic power, and the Soviets saved the empire, but changed the relationships between the

provinces at the same time. In so doing, they had to sacrifice the interests of the Russian population. And the Russian people paid for this.

E *Actually there seem to be two different points in what you say, and both of them are very important. First of all, you raise a very interesting issue similar to Tocqueville's famous point about the ancien régime and the French revolution: the continuity of the state as a centralised bureaucratic structure from the pre-revolutionary to the post-revolutionary political system. To this you add another, more original observation by pointing out that the result of this historical continuity was the preservation of the empire, whose creation and expansion represented the raison d'être of the military-bureaucratic structure. Once you save the bureaucracy as a social group, you also have to save its historical purpose, the empire. But in the new ideological context, Moscow, in order to save the empire, had to resort to buying the loyalty of the non-Russian elite by granting them a privileged position.*

Alexander Zinoviev - It goes without saying that those who organised the revolution and the social groups whose role was enhanced as a result of the revolution did not see things so clearly. They looked at their immediate interest, and did not pay much attention to the laws of history. For them, saving the empire was not an historical, but merely a political necessity. Only now, long after the conclusion of the social and political processes that took place in the 1920s and 1930s can we make these generalisations. Obviously at the time it was impossible to think the way we do today. Now, with substantial hindsight, everything is simpler and clearer. But in real life, nothing is very clear. It is inevitable that to contemporary observers the picture of events appears very confused, like the disorderly overlapping and mutual interference of different and sometimes contradictory historical processes.

Similarly, it looks obvious nowadays that Gorbachev is trying to save the Soviet Union as a state structure. And indeed he tries. But why? As with Lenin, this question can be raised again. If the answer is that Gorbachev represents the state system, the social forces whose destiny is strictly related to that of the state, it still tells one nothing. It is something too general, too abstract. For us, for our contemporaries, the problem has quite a different form. The question we can try to answer is a more specific one—why is it that Gorbachev does not want to give the Baltic republics their freedom? For this question we are in a position to find a concrete, political, explanation. Indeed there are many reasons for Gorbachev's policy. For instance, from the military point of view,

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many army and navy bases are located in the Baltic republics, which play a very important strategic role in the defense system of the Soviet territory and for its maritime access. Moreover, from a political point of view, if the Baltic republics are allowed to separate from the Soviet Union, the whole world will see it as a signal, as proof of Moscow's weakness. In all the other republics, the temptation to follow their example will become irresistible. Thus the Soviet leadership—Gorbachev and other members of government—must not think of the preservation of the empire in order to be concerned with the situation created by the national aspiration of the Baltic countries, they only have to think about themselves and their own personal fate, about the preservation of their own personal position. Only that, in order to save themselves and their power, they are forced to save the Soviet Empire

E
I *Their interest coincides with the historical tendencies.*

Alexander Zinoviev - Sure. The same happened with Stalin. Stalin wanted to realise a political project—and his personal purposes happened to coincide with the historical tendency. On the contrary, Lenin personally considered the Russian empire a “prison of peoples” and wanted to destroy it. But when he became the leader of the country, saving his own personal position became his first priority. When, for example, it became clear that it was impossible for Moscow to keep Finland, Poland, and the Baltic countries in the Russian empire, the new revolutionary leadership bowed to the inevitable. In the Caucasus, on the contrary, not only it was possible to keep the inheritance of the Czarist empire, but the objective of preserving the new revolutionary power could only be pursued through the occupation of Georgia or Armenia. And so it was done. Lenin's decision was not a result of his ideological convictions: it was a question of survival.

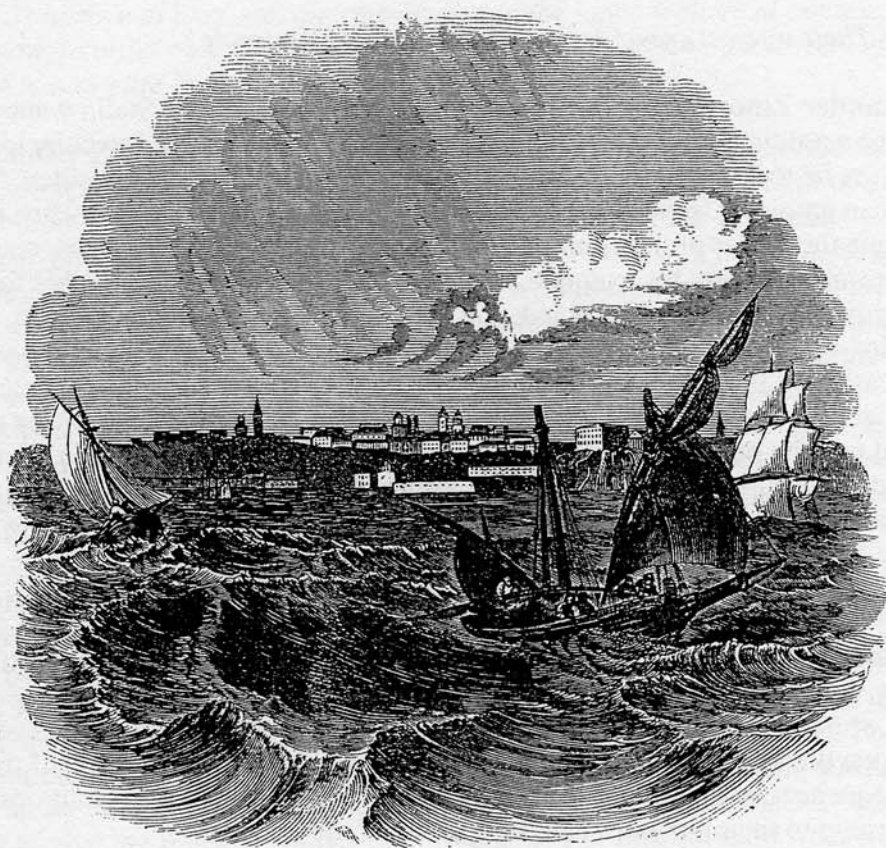
E
I *Very pragmatic.*

Alexander Zinoviev - Yes, very pragmatic. And the situation is very similar today. You know, it is impossible to find among party and state bureaucrats the men who could look at the continuity between the old and new regimes with Tocqueville's perception of things. Usually these people do not think of the consequences of their behaviour. They act according to today's conditions and according to their purposes and their views of the situation.

E
I *So, they are politicians, not really ideologues.*

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Alexander Zinoviev - In the new book I have just finished writing, I try to explain that the Soviet Union is not a political entity constructed in any way according to a Marxist project. With the exception of some coincidences, historical coincidences, Marxism had nothing to do with Soviet revolution and the Soviet society. The Russian revolution could happen without Marxism. In the Russian spiritual environment, there were enough materials for a Communist ideology without Marx. The reason why Marxism became a Soviet ideology is simply that it was old Russian tradition to exaggerate the importance of Western cultural influences and the inferiority of ideas that are



Rough waters off Odessa

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authentically Russian. And, in practice, what Gorbachev is doing now adds up to refusing this ideology in many of the most important aspects. He has abandoned the so-called class positions.

E *But isn't he making the same error, exaggerating again the importance of*
I *Western ideologies? Aren't he and his economic advisors making a myth of the ideology of the market, of capitalism, in a very naive way?*

Alexander Zinoviev - Absolutely. And this is one of the manifestations of the depth of the crisis of the Soviet system. The Communist leaders have totally lost the respect of Marxist ideology and they have now to substitute it with ideological elements of western origin. And since Western ideology today is very strong and very active, what this operation adds up to is actually a capitulation. A capitulation, however, that is not not for ever, but only for a short period.

E *There is, in your analysis of Soviet history, what could seem at first*
I *sight an element of contradiction. In describing the Stalinist period you mention a socio-political phenomenon that you name the creation of the people's power. Is this not contradictory with the idea that there is, from the czarist regime and into the revolutionary one, an uninterrupted bureaucratic rule?*

Alexander Zinoviev - The revolution was a big revolt of masses, of course. And the revolution was bound to fall first of all against czarism: not only against capitalism and feudalism, but against czarism in all its aspects. This means that the regime the Russian people revolted against was not perceived just as the rule of the nobility, of the capitalists and the bureaucracy. The revolution destroyed everything and put the country into a state of chaos. To survive, the country developed a new power structure—people's power. After the revolution a new system of power appeared, and people were sure that they had invented a new form of political organisation. Gradually, the State bureaucracy began to appear again. Its restoration, however, was not the result of conscious and deliberate action. On the contrary, it took place almost automatically. Thus, up to World War II, two systems coexisted: people's power and state bureaucratic power.

E *What form did people's power take?*

Alexander Zinoviev - People's power was structured in a rather simple way. On the top there was a charismatic chief, like Lenin or Stalin, with a group of second-rank leaders around him. And the Chief spoke directly to the masses, that were organised by groups of activists. Lenin was such a chief, the leader of the revolution, but then this role was taken up by Stalin, who was the actual creator of the Soviet State. Both of them, in order to preserve their own power and to put the country at work under their direction, gradually began to restore the bureaucratic system. It can be said, however, that in the 1920s and in the 1930s the power of this renewed State bureaucracy was kept under the control of people's power.

In the Stalinist system, there was a supreme power directly in touch with the masses, and the most important bureaucratic structures, such as the KGB, the secret police, the army and so on, were only instruments of power, not a power structure by themselves. The party apparatus as the basis of the state power developed only gradually. Before the World War II, we could see in the Soviet Union the coexistence of these two systems—people's power and the bureaucratic system, with people's power actually controlling and constraining the bureaucratic system. The situation changed after the war. As the party apparatus was developed to the highest level, the bureaucratic system became much stronger than popular control. Stalin of course largely manipulated the party bureaucracy, but after the war party apparatus became the real master of society.

E
I *You mean after the war or after Stalin's death?*

Alexander Zinoviev - Actually this change occurred in the very early post-war years, when Stalin was still alive. Stalin was the undisputable chief, but in reality the party apparatus was becoming the master. Stalin lost most of his power during and in the end of the war. There are many indications of this. If he was still presented as an all-powerful and omniscient leader, that was only out of inertia. In reality, the situation in the country was controlled by the State and party apparatus.

E
I *You define Brezhnevism as a reaction of defence of the apparatus against Khrushchev's Stalinist-style voluntarism. This is an interesting point.*

Alexander Zinoviev - Krushchev was a transitional figure. Krushchev's revolution was a big change in Soviet history. It was a victory of the State

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apparatus over whatever was left of people's power. But Krushchev carried out this revolution as a pure Stalinist, i.e. with Stalin's methods. There were alternatives, though. These transformations were inevitable, but it was possible to bring about the same revolutionary changes with Malenkov's methods. Had Malenkov been in the place of Krushchev, this turning point would have taken place in spite of everything, but in another form. Krushchev behaved as a Stalinist—in a voluntaristic manner.

E
I *What would be an alternative way? Can you make a hypothesis?*

Alexander Zinoviev - The alternative was Brezhnevism.

E
I *What is the difference?*

Alexander Zinoviev - The difference between these two types of leadership, I would explain in the following manner. The Stalinist style is a voluntaristic style. The leadership wants the population to behave in a certain way. Brezhnevist style is not voluntaristic. It is opportunistic, or better, is passive, very passive. The society is allowed to drift its own way and the government follows this spontaneous movement.

In the Stalinist system, the structure of the power has at its top the numerically limited circle of the charismatic chief. This apparatus of the personal dictatorship controls the State and party apparatus, but it also has at its disposal certain tools which are outside of the party apparatus. The KGB was independent of the party apparatus and was an instrument to control it. In the Brezhnevist style of government, Brezhnev—a very un-charismatic chief—had, like Stalin, his own apparatus of personal dictatorship. But this was part of the party apparatus, and operated inside it, not over it. Moreover, as channels of his power he did not use the same means as Stalin did—marches, demonstrations, activists and so on, i.e. the channels of people's power—but official channels, official and bureaucratic methods. As you can see, this makes a difference. And there are many other signs of this difference in styles, by the thousands if one goes into the details. For instance, in the different way in which mass movements were organised. In Stalin's style, big rallies and demonstrations were normal practice. In Brezhnev style, only a few representative of ordinary people were obliged to march on Red Square. The big demonstrations had all but disappeared; they were no longer as necessary as they were in Stalin's period, when Communist society had to be constructed.

You see, after the revolution, we had a state of chaos, and out of this chaos Stalin created everything. Brezhnev's time was instead a period of administration. Brezhnev inherited everything already made, and his task was to keep this system more or less in the same condition, avoiding conflicts whenever possible. In other words, Brezhnev's style of government corresponds to the normal state of the communist society. If you want to know what is communism in the best form, you look at the Brezhnev years.

E
I *Do you mean that what is today called "stagnation" is nothing but the normal condition of mature communism?*

Alexander Zinoviev - Brezhnevism is the maturity and a very healthy state of Communism. And the condition of the Soviet society under Gorbachev' is typical of a period of crisis. *Perestroika* is the symptom of a crisis, not a factor of progress of the Soviet society.

E
I *Is it a crisis or a reaction to the crisis? This is an important point.*

Alexander Zinoviev - No. It is a crisis itself—not a reaction to the crisis. As it is well known, Gorbachev's ideologists try to describe the situation as if the crisis took place in Brezhnev's time, and as if they were trying to correct and improve the situation. The contrary is true. Brezhnev's period was a very healthy period, by the standard of Soviet society. And it is under Gorbachev that there are many reasons for the crisis, one of the most important being Gorbachev's very policy. In Stalin's voluntaristic way, he wanted to introduce some innovations to correct the unsatisfactory functioning of the Soviet system. He and his advisor thought that they could force people to behave the way they wanted, thus showing the extent to which this generation of party leaders is actually made of pupils of Stalin. But they had very badly misjudged the situation. They didn't expect that the consequences would go as far as they have gone, and they lost control. *Perestroika* is a crisis in itself. If you want to know what crisis is the crisis of communism, look at *perestroika*.

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I *This is a very important and quite original point, since everybody accepts the idea that perestroika is an attempt at correcting factors that have led the Soviet society in its worst crisis ever.*

Alexander Zinoviev - No. This is a lie.

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I Are you actually saying that, starting from a wrong analysis of the Brezhnev years, the present Soviet leadership developed some ideas of a reform and thought of pushing them with Stalinist methods, only to discover that the system could not be made to work that way any longer? That Gorbachev had rather naively thought he could use the machinery of the party and of the State the way Stalin used it, and then he has suddenly discovered the machine was not obeying.

Alexander Zinoviev - Yes. He was sure he would succeed using this new policy. But in Brezhnev's time of "normalcy" of Communist society, the crisis had been brewing. That "normalcy" had created a social bomb, so that it was enough to push the button to make it go off. And Gorbachev did exactly it. He pushed the button of the crisis.

Alexander Zinoviev has been wanted by the Soviet Political Police since the age of eighteen. After World War II, in which he was a fighting pilot, he was admitted to the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

In 1967 he was stripped of Soviet citizenship and expelled to the West.

His most recent books are: *Katastrojka* (1989) and *Mémoires d'un homme en trop*, Editions Complexes, Paris 1990.

E
I Was his idea to prevent the crisis?

Alexander Zinoviev - Not really. No one had predicted the crisis. There was only one man who predicted the crisis. But no one wanted to listen to him. None of the Western sociologists, Sovietologists, Kremlinologists, et a. was able to predict the crisis. And when Gorbachev launched *perestrojka*, *glasnost* and so on, the whole world applauded him, he was the hero of the year, the man of the decade. He was celebrated by the entire world, and nobody noticed the contradictory nature of his ambition. He wanted at the same time to be a dissident and hold the top power position in Soviet society. He wanted to be at the same time Stalin and Solzhenitsyn, Luther and the Pope.

Probably, it was this ambition, his big ambition, that made him so popular. But gradually, the country began to become restless and disobedient. Actually, it took Gorbachev two or three years to push the country into the present state of crisis. He is responsible for the desecration of the once all-powerful State and Party apparatus, and for having set openly in motion aspirations that had been repressed for decades. Inevitably, all possible spirit of moderation was immediately lost, and the pace of the crisis became such that Gorbachev was obliged to start running after the spontaneous development occurring in the Soviet society, as if he were at the origin of this movement, and pretending he was in control of it. Only most recently he has begun to take some measures to stop this movement. But identifying what kind of measures are appropriate at this stage is quite a problem.

One thing is in any case absolutely clear: at the core of the recent developments *perestroika*, at the centre of Gorbachev's manipulation of power, is the intention to stop this process. That is the reason why Gorbachev wants to create the apparatus of personal dictatorship outside of the party structure, so he would be able to control everything. It is a very interesting coincidence. From the beginning, he wanted to force the country to go forward but he failed and now he is forced to behave again like Stalin, not any longer for the country to grow freer but to save his own position. Actually, today's problem for the Soviet Union is not to catch up economically with the West, but to catch up politically with Brezhnev. Only that, in order to recreate the system of power of Brezhnev's time, Gorbachev is forced to behave like the Chief. And as in Stalin's time, when the personal fate of Stalin was the fate of the country, now the personal fate of Gorbachev coincides with the fate of the Soviet Union.

E *You say that Gorbachev's policy has created the present Soviet crisis. But*
I *at the same time you speak very frequently of the existence of objective social laws and you say that you had yourself predicted the crisis. So, which were the objective social laws that was leading to the crisis?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - Twenty years ago, when I was a professor in the Soviet Union, I developed my own theory of Communist societies. I obviously started from the Marxist theoretical model of capitalism, that taught us that, for structural reasons, crises of overproduction were inevitable for western societies. On the contrary, communist systems are based on the abolition of the very structural aspects that are related to worker's underconsumption, and can therefore live in a total absence of crises. Later, however, I explored the basic

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axioms of an actual social model of communism, and wrote articles that came to the conclusion that the opposite was true, that it was impossible for communism to exist without crisis, that crisis was an inevitable precondition of communism.

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I *Are you practically saying that communism can exist only in times of extreme misery, hardship and destruction, such as post-war periods? Do you mean that during and after the war, communism was perfectly adapted to the situation, because that was an exceptional condition of crisis? Wasn't the construction of a Communist regime in the Soviet Union was possible because at that time the Soviet society structurally very simple?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - There is on this question an important problem of definition. What are the fundamental features of a crisis? On this point, that is not only terminological, I tend to give a definition different from any other that is accepted by Soviet ideologues, Western Sovietologists, Kremlinologists and critics of the Soviet Union. They are convinced that the symptoms of a crisis are: corruption, food shortages, lack of discipline. And indeed, all these elements add up to a very bad situation that, in a capitalistic environment, would indicate a state of crisis. But this does not apply to communism. These features—corruption, bureaucratic red tape—are the absolute normalcy for a Communist society. They are imbedded in its nature. Crises, in communist societies, have therefore to consist of something else. And indeed in a communist environment crises coincide with a disorganisation of the social system. Only that the reasons of such a disorganisation are different from those prevailing under capitalism. For instance, today's social disorganisation of communism is a result of the successful development of the Soviet bloc in the 60s and 70s.

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I *Could you elaborate on this point?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - In Soviet-type systems, as well as in capitalism, crises may be engendered by too much success. Only that, in communism, the way in which crises can be brought about by success is different: it does not manifest itself through excess production and excess capital that make investment impossible, but through a growth in size and social complexity. After the World War II, the spread of communism in the world was extremely successful. Many eastern European countries became Communist; and then China, Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, several countries in Africa. Communism was a success,



Russian Discipline

although not an economic success. Communist ones are not societies where failure or success can always be assessed with an economic yardstick. This only applies to capitalistic countries. The basic characteristic of communism is not an economic one. It is a certain type of social organisation, and inside this social organisation, a well identified system of government. In this respect, Brezhnev's period was not a period when Communism stagnated. This is a lie of Gorbachev's propaganda. If you compare the situation of the country before Brezhnev's death and eighteen years before, you would be astonished. It was a period of growth. But today people do not want to recognise that. In Brezhnev's period, the Soviet Union progressed much more than in previous years in every respect, mainly under the aspect of social complexity. The number of doctors, of teachers, of factories, of military organisations,

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of institutions of all kinds, increased immensely. Even in the field of culture, in Brezhnev's time appeared many new, non-conformist writers. Of course they were repressed and punished, but they appeared anyhow. Now that the country enjoys a much larger degree of intellectual freedom, nothing appears.

E *This is certainly an interesting and original remark. And it is a fact that*
I *in the years of perestroika there has been no visible boom in arts and literature.*

Alexandre Zinoviev - Brezhnev's period was a period of big growth in everything, and it laid the main grounds for today's crisis. Too much success is bad for the Soviet system. For Communism can normally take root and survive only if the country is very poor and very simple. This was the case in Stalin's Russia. At that times the supreme Chief could control everything directly. He could know every person in a position of responsibility. But in Stalin's time there were very few factories, very few universities, very few writers, the number of the directors of factories was about a thousand. In Brezhnev's time, everything had to be counted in the hundreds of thousands. The party and State structure had become too complex and diversified, and too many countries were under the control of the Soviet Union. The activity of the system became so big that it was impossible for the Chief to control everybody everywhere. The result was a disintegration of the system.

Here we come to my point about the existence of objective laws of society. I can give you an example to clarify my thought. Let us assume that we have a beam supporting a roof. As the building grows larger and larger is impossible to make it longer and longer. At a certain moment, it will inevitably break. The same is true of societies that are organised in a system that is as rigid as a beam. It is impossible to increase without limitations the population in the country, and then the number of bureaucrats needed at all level to officer this population. In a country like communist China, for instance, in order to increase the level of organisation to European standards, it would take three hundred million officials and bureaucrats. Obviously, this is impossible. There is no other solution but to reduce its population by at least a factor of two.

E *To reduce the population?*
I

Alexandre Zinoviev - Yes. For instance by dividing China in two or more states. The problem exists even in the Soviet Union, with less then three

hundred million people. This is too much, and this explains the spontaneous tendency towards disintegration; or at least, this is one of the reasons of this tendency. Complexity is an objective factor that it is impossible to control politically. In political organisation there are certain objective constraints that cannot be disregarded, but unfortunately there is no theory of the unruliness, of the ungovernability of excessively big, complex and rigid social systems.

Obviously, such a theory would make no sense for western societies. The reason is very simple: western society is a pluralist society. This means that many different social sub-systems co-exist in the same space at the same time. Communist society, instead, is a homogeneous society. It is one system, and this system is organised in a standard way. Every factory is like any other factory. Every region has the same power structure as any other region.

E
I *Are you saying that there are objective, structural limits to the possibility of development and expansion of the communist system, that these limits have been reached during the Brezhnev era, and that they cannot be solved without a change in the nature of social organisation?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - It cannot be doubted that there are objective limitations, that the nature of the system limits its own expansion. And after the Brezhnev era it has become clear that, if the nature of the system had to be preserved, if communism had to survive, it would be better to reduce its ambitions, and even to give up some of its achievements.

E
I *Do you mean that abandoning Eastern Europe could have been a move aimed at saving the system?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - Well. Moscow didn't want to lose Eastern Europe, but it happened. The Soviet Union was defeated and left. The abandonment of Eastern Europe can however be transformed in a positive element. In human evolution, every progress is accompanied by some regression, and viceversa. Thus, for the Soviet Union, the recent changes in Eastern Europe can also bear an advantage. And the same with Cuba, Nicaragua, and so on. The Soviet Union can devote more of its resource for internal purposes. It can be said with a good degree of probability that in five years the Soviet Union will have overcome the crisis.

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E *You seem to have at least the basic elements of a theory of necessary social processes, of objective social laws. Do you see the Soviet Union overcoming of the crisis and going back to a Brezhnev-type condition of stability?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - The Soviet Union will not go *back*, it will go *forward* to a Brezhnev-type condition of stability. Yesterday you were healthy; your temperature was 36. Today you have a cold and your temperature is 38. It is fairly easily to predict that, barring complications, in some days you will have recovered and your temperature will be 36 again. The fact that you recover your health does not mean you go back, it only means that you will evolve towards a new condition whose features, if you have a notion of what that healthy state is, can be at least partially predicted. Similarly, there is a certain degree of probability that in the not-too-distant future the Soviet society will have reached again a stable state which, if compared with the previous one, will show some similar feature, and some different ones.

E *Can you identify the characteristics that in communist society are a sign of normality from the ones that are a symptom of crisis?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - Yes, although it is not an easy task. You know, people lived in the physical world for many thousands of years and they saw many examples of mechanical movement, but it does not mean that, until Newton appeared, they could understand its laws of mechanical movement. The same with social life. People have an experience of life in society, but they cannot translate this experience to the theoretical level.

I believe however that it is possible to identify the characteristics of the normal state of a Soviet-type society, and to establish the parameters to measure the stability of a society, (viz. its ability to survive) and its immunity, (viz. its ability to resist external influences). I have already mentioned the proportion of officials to the total population of the country. But another very meaningful one is the speed of hierarchical processes, viz. how much time is needed to send the information from the bottom of the society to the top.

In Western society there are many specialists who make forecasts. They know the situation in the world market and they predict an increase or decrease in the value of stocks, in the price of commodities, in corporate profits, etc. The same is possible, up to a point in Soviet society. Only that, for this peculiar

type of social body, in order to make forecasts one only has to identify a different set of indicators.

E
I *Will they be mostly social indicators, or also economic?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - There will also be some economic indicators, but not the ones that would be used for capitalist societies. Communist society is not an economic society in the Western way. Political economy of the Western type becomes senseless if one tries to apply it to the Soviet case. It is senseless to compare Soviet enterprises with Western enterprises. You cannot even compare a Soviet restaurant with a Western restaurant. A Western restaurant, is normally run by five or six persons, some of them working part time. In the Soviet Union, a restaurant has at least 50 or 60 employees. It does not mean that this restaurant is ten times better than the other in terms of food or service provided, but it fits with the objective of Soviet enterprises. For a Communist enterprise, the main objective is to give work to thousands in order to organise them, to control them. That's all. It is only accessory that they can earn some money and put out a certain quantity of products.

Money, by the way, does not have the same role in Communist and in Western societies. Some economists say that Soviet money has no basis: it is laughable and useless. It looks like money but it is not money. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to explain such ideas to Western people.

E
I *At present, however, there is a lot of excitement in the Soviet Union about the introduction of elements of market economy into the communist system.*

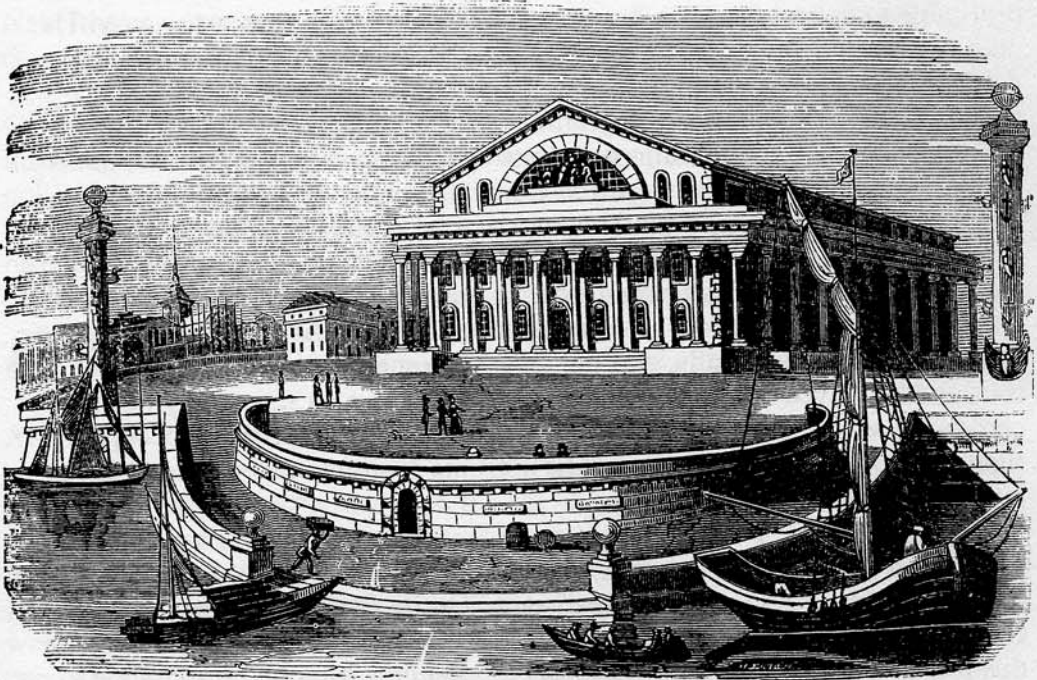
Alexandre Zinoviev - This is impossible. Everybody today uses the expression, "market economy" but nobody knows what it really means. Very few people, in societies impregnated with Marxist ideas understand that today the market economy in the West has nothing to do with the market economy of the nineteenth century. The complexity of the relationship between states and enterprises, the role of the banking system, completely escape them.

Moreover, I am convinced that the only form of market economy that can exist in a communist country is a criminal economy; it is the legalisation of a criminal economy. Introducing elements of the so-called "free market" in the USSR would be something similar to the process that you have in Colombia,

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where organised crime is establishing its own legality and actually taking over the government. Actually one could say that what is going on in Colombia is nothing but perestroika.

E *What is in the end your opinion on Gorbachev and the people who*
I *support his policy?*



The St. Peterburgh Stock Exchange, 1840

Alexandre Zinoviev - We can consider the present political situation in the USSR from different points of view: from sociological, historical, political and moral points of view. Professionally, I analyse Gorbachev's period, Gorbachev's activity and his policy of *perestroika* as a sociologist. But at the same time I am a man with certain moral principles, and I can express my opinion of the people who applaud Gorbachev, declare to support his policy, and express a severe condemnation on Stalin. I do not mind criticising Stalin, but personally I despise people who profit by criticising Stalin today. This attitude of mine has nothing to do with the scientific approach, or even a political judgement. It is purely personal disgust for opportunism.

I said in one of my interviews that if everybody criticises Gorbachev, I will defend him.

E
I *What you cannot accept is this new conformity.*

Alexandre Zinoviev - I consider my position one of moral courage. When it was dangerous to criticise Stalin, I was anti-Stalinist. Then when it became profitable to be anti-Stalinist, I gave up criticising Stalin. It was too easy. This does not mean that I am against criticism of Stalin or that I defend Stalin. I don't want to defend Stalin, I want to defend the truth about Stalin. I don't want to say that Stalin was a very kind man. On the contrary, he was the embodiment of evil. But Stalin was not stupid, his policy was not a crime. A similar attitude I have with regard to Gorbachev. I do not believe that Gorbachev is an extremely kind man, or that he wants to liberate the Soviet system. He is just a party official. But nevertheless, this ordinary, very mediocre party official has been forced to play a certain historical role. And an historical role has to be evaluated independently from the person who happens to play it. Stalin, personally, was not an exceptional man, but he played the key role, and he played this role better than anybody also. In short, only one man could play such a role, only one. Like Gorbachev, he happened to occupy the right position at the right time, and he used his position very successfully for himself.

Yeltsin, on the contrary, seems to me a very stupid man. He is a caricature of Gorbachev. He is nothing in comparison to Gorbachev, but not because Gorbachev is much cleverer. It is only because Gorbachev has begun playing this role and Yeltsin has no opportunity to substitute him. It is impossible to have two presidents, two general secretaries. Gorbachev occupies this position and he has no competition.

Such a situation is nothing exceptional, for it can be seen every day. Stalinism appeared not against a social law, but as a result of a social law. Another man could have been in his place, and the process could have taken another direction, but nevertheless, some very important traits of the process would have been the same in spite of the personality of the leader. Trotsky was perhaps better educated than Stalin, but Stalin already held the position, and Trotsky had no chance to be in his place—it was impossible. He was thus forced to play another role and this role was bound to lead him to be defeated in the end.

At present, a process of counter-*perestroika* is already going on now. The question of who will fulfil this task—if it is to be Gorbachev himself or somebody else—is in the end irrelevant. Whether it is Ligachev or Yeltsin or Gorbachev, any Soviet leader will be forced to fulfil this task, but they can each fulfil it in a different way: Ligachev, faster and more radically in Brezhnev's style, Yeltsin in a very radical Stalinist form, and Gorbachev in a more liberal form that represents a compromise between Stalinism and Brezhnevism. Nevertheless, any Soviet leader will go the way of anti-*perestroika*, if the country is to survive.

Of course, Gorbachev could also decide to destroy the Soviet Union. This is not impossible. In such a big country; it is already very dangerous to follow this policy of *perestroika*. Already now, Gorbachev has carried the Soviet Union to the brink of catastrophe. Two more years of such a policy, and the country will be completely destroyed. In such a case, Gorbachev would very quickly be ousted or killed, and his successor would take a much more radical path.

E
I You seem to see this anti-*perestroika* as a kind of historical necessity.

Alexandre Zinoviev - Anti-*perestroika* is going on already. It is already in progress. Here, we have to make a difference between *perestroika* as a policy, and *perestroika* as a social process, the social consequences of Gorbachev's attempted reform. Gorbachev set *perestroika* in motion as a government policy, in order to improve the political situation and strengthen the regime, and he insists on going further in this direction, because he is sure that it is the only way to save the USSR. But Gorbachev's reforms have brought about the present critical condition of the country. Not only have Gorbachev's measures been unable to improve the situation; on the contrary, they made the crisis much worse. And, as the social process that is associated with *perestroika* is nothing but a crisis, the society has had a spontaneous reaction, has developed a form of resistance. This behaviour, that has existed from the beginning, and now it is increasing and becoming widespread among the population is what I call anti-*perestroika*.

Confronted with a social process openly directed against his policy, Gorbachev behaviour has become ambiguous. On the surface, he continues to stand for democratisation, for the continuation of *perestroika* as a policy. In substance, he is ready to ride the wave of anti-*perestroika*. He is a politician, a communist leader, a social chameleon.

E
I *He is a man for all seasons.*

Alexandre Zinoviev - Yes. And this is crucial if one has to understand the distribution of roles in the present Soviet ruling group. It is Gorbachev who has created the so-called conservatives, like in Stalin's time the enemies of the people. There is no better conservative alternative to Gorbachev than Gorbachev himself.

E
I *Do you mean that Ligachev is a kind of projection of what Gorbachev could be?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - Different people in the Soviet government play different roles. This happens in every government, in every social group. It is the arithmetic of politics. Ligachev—the official conservative—is playing the role of the no-nonsense man. Yeltsin has the role of *enfant terrible*. Gorbachev manoeuvres in between, avoiding the two extremes, conservatism and adventurism, and actually uses one against the other for his own purposes. This is nothing new. Stalin did the same, when he used Zinoviev against Trotsky.

E
I *Would you also compare glasnost to the policy of denunciation in Stalin's period?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - You are right. The two things are comparable. In Stalin's time, there were two kinds of denunciation: secret denunciation and open denunciation. You can compare today's *glasnost* with Stalin's open denunciation, when people could speak on party meetings against certain personalities, write letters to newspapers and so on. So this campaign against enemies of the people was to a certain extent a policy of *glasnost*.

Today, however, we are half a century more advanced. We have radio, television, hundreds of newspapers. In Stalin's time there were very few newspapers, no television, five films a year. Now the means of communication, of information are very big, and the possibilities of this policy are very big. But this policy is very ambiguous and many-sided. To a certain extent it is a policy of disinformation. It is a means to distract the attention of people from important sides of their lives, and to manipulate people, manipulate public opinion especially in the West. But it is also a means of provocation, for example on the national movements, *glasnost* was used as a provocation aimed at splitting the leading groups, splitting the population.

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E
I *What do you mean?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - Gorbachev wanted to get by his side as many party officials as possible. Many were against him, the so-called conservatives. So he took advantage of *glasnost* to provoke demonstrations against the conservatives, for example in Georgia. In order to have the opportunity of appointing his people in different regions of the country, he didn't hesitate to provoke the nationalists and the masses. Unfortunately for him, the masses went further than Gorbachev wanted them to go, and rapidly he began losing control over the system of power and over society at large, and the word crisis became very common. But he has succeeded in his aim of creating a crisis inside the entire system of power in the Soviet Union, i.e. the highest leadership and the apparatus of the party. Thus, through *glasnost* Gorbachev has created the conditions to try to impose his own power on the party and the State, that is on the social bodies that after Stalin had grown so large as to become uncontrollable.

E
I *So, Gorbachev is trying to create "power over power"*

Alexandre Zinoviev - The power machinery in the Soviet Union is a very big and complex body. One Soviet citizen in every six belongs to it. There is the central apparatus of power and the local branches, but it is a body without a head. To control the mechanism as a whole, it takes a ruling system over the system that rules society.

E
I *To organise a system to control the system that controls society.*

Alexandre Zinoviev - Yes, but - for the sake of precision - one should add that the structure does not have only two levels. The small apparatus of personal dictatorship—five-six persons—is obviously not enough to control the entire bureaucratic machinery. Also in Stalin's time, very few people had regular contacts with him everyday. Other contacts were not regular. It becomes therefore necessary to have other intermediate strata between the court of the Chief and society. In reality the system ends up having something like fifteen different levels, i.e. a size and a degree of intermediation that makes it totally useless for the purpose of social control and actually unmanageable in itself.

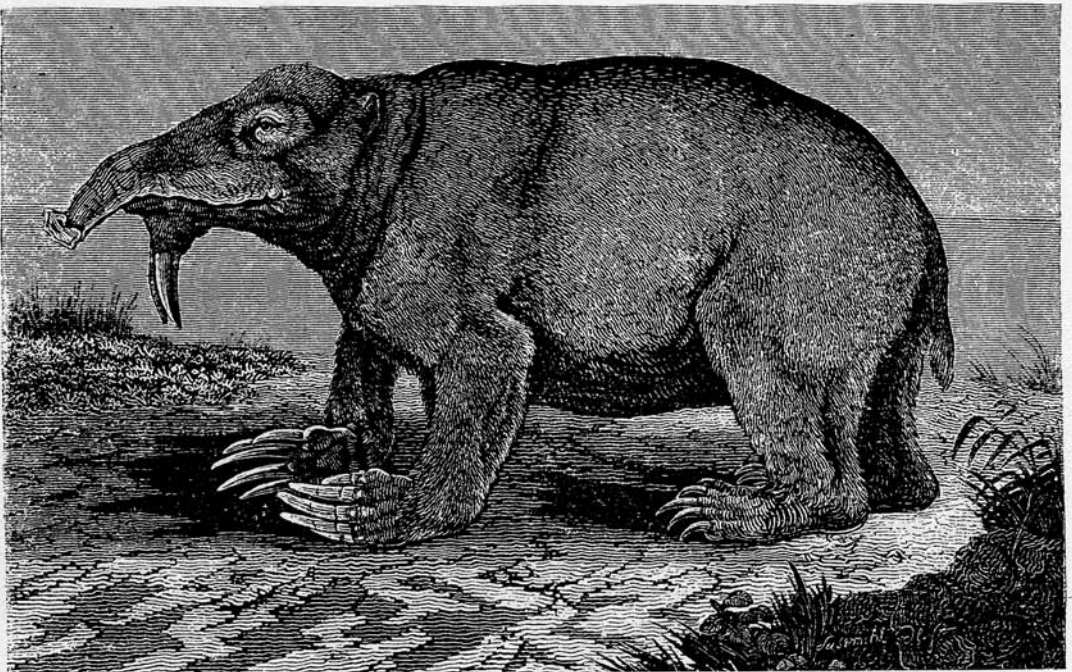
E
I *You seem to think that the system, as it is, cannot be brought under the control of Gorbachev's "super system". Do you also rule out the possibility of changing the system?*

BACKGROUND FILE

Alexandre Zinoviev - It is possible if you destroy it: if you destroy this system and create another one with a new set of rules. There are general laws of organisation governing a Communist society. If you change them, by introducing the rules of a Western-style society, what you obtain is a crisis of the old system, and then, later, you might have the birth of a new social organisation out of the ruins of the old one.

E *You do not seem to foresee that Soviet society will continue to exist on a*
I *communist basis?*

Alexandre Zinoviev - Privatisation, that Gorbachev wants to introduce in the hope that it might enhance the efficiency of the system, is in reality an element of crisis, is not a solution to the crisis. It disorganises the system. The same can be said of Lenin's New Economic Policy. It was against the communist system, it was an element of disorganisation. Stalin understood this crucial point and stopped this experiment by slaughtering all the peasants that had been involved in it. Now what are the elements of disorganisation:



Primitive, enormous and powerful

Alexander Zinoviev

the appearance of new parties. The communist system can of course be disorganised. The communist system can be killed, as it is not eternal. There is a normal cycle of life in everything and everybody: one is born, reaches maturity, old age and dies.

E
I *But you do not think the communist system has reached the dying point.*

Alexandre Zinoviev - It is too early. For a social system to die, it takes many centuries. The capitalist system is old but it is not yet dying. The Chinese system was there for many thousands of years: Byzantium was very poorly organised but survived for eight centuries, as also did the Inca empire. The Roman empire lasted over a thousand years.

E
I *There are different historical precedents, though, for instance, Alexander the Great's empire lasted only a few years and so did the Empire created by the French Revolution: it did not last very long.*

Alexandre Zinoviev - But the social system existed before Alexander the Great many hundreds of years, and survived him long. We can say the same about Stalin's system. All depends on what we mean with the word "system". There are social systems and there are political systems. The political system that was the result of the French Revolution did not last very long. But the French Revolution paved the way for the capitalist society and, in a similar way, the Communist revolution paved the way for the state's bureaucratic society. The French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution. The Russian Revolution was an officials' revolution, a revolution in favour of bureaucrats.

E
I *You seem to see communism not as a form of modernisation, but as an original social system in itself, as a system with lasting features comparable to the Indian caste organization.*

Alexandre Zinoviev - Yes. Communism has peculiarities that make it comparable to Byzantine society, Indian society, to any society. Western society has a certain social structure as well, but the Soviet social system is something like the Chinese system, that Marx called Asian feudalism, where the bureaucracy ruled for centuries and centuries. In China, private property did not exist. Every official was appointed like in the Communist system.

E Do you rule out the possibility of the nomenklatura transforming their
I control over the resources, factories, land of the Soviet Union into a form of private property?

Alexandre Zinoviev - In this case, the Soviet Union would drown into a civil war.

E Does this mean that you consider the present popular reaction against
I the development of family business under the form of "cooperatives", and the relative enrichment of their owners as a phenomenon that might become very serious? What would be the consequences of an outright restoration of private property?

Alexandre Zinoviev - The restoration of private property in the USSR is a realistic possibility. But I am convinced that the majority of the population—especially in the European part of the country—would have recourse to violence to fight against such a move.

E
I So you mean the *homo sovieticus* will revolt against them.

Alexandre Zinoviev - I think so. I would personally fight against the privatisation as, although I am against the Soviet system, I am a *homo sovieticus*: I was born after the revolution, and for me to live without private property, without formal relationships and so on—all this is much better.

In two words, what is communism? Communism is a society in which every citizen is an employee of the state. And the fact that everybody is a state employee can be considered a factor of freedom. For the normal *homo sovieticus*, the fact that the State owns everything is more than just being the employee of a company and at the same time holding some stocks of the company itself. That is not enough. In communist society every man is guaranteed a job, education, housing and so on. His life is very simple, and the need for owning things is reduced to a minimum. For example, here in the West I am obliged to have tons of papers. When I lived in the Soviet Union I only owned my clothes. I didn't own even books or notes. All the books I have read came from libraries. And I kept all my files in my memory.

Everybody in the West is sure that ideology as a factor shaping the entire society exists only in the Soviet Union. But here in the West, people are under the

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influence of ideology even more than in the Soviet Union. Soviet ideology is less effective than Western ideology, because Western ideology provides for some form of pleasure, while Soviet ideology is very unpleasant, tends to oblige people to think and behave in a certain way. Here you are not obliged: you can watch tv with pleasure, pornography, detective stories and advertisements. Well, all this is ideology, only that you are so accustomed that you don't recognise it for what it is. In the Soviet Union at least we recognise it.

The Soviet ideology has been so sharply criticised that by now everyone is aware of being intoxicated by ideology. But this happens only because our official ideology is in a state of very serious crisis as well. We are aware of the damage done by our ideology because right now a process of de-ideologisation is going from the top to the bottom of Soviet society. Every society is to a certain extent a society of slavery and freedom, although in different ways. A Soviet is not a slave absolutely. He is a slave but in other ways than Western people. He is free, but in other ways than Western people. Western people do not notice their slavery; they are accustomed. For me, as a Soviet, the element of slavery in the Western way of life is evident and, in many respects, absolutely unacceptable.

Giuseppe Sacco, the Editor of *The European Journal of International Affairs*, interviewed Alexander Zinoviev in Munich on 21 April 1990.