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Zinovyev Aimed at Communism but Hit Russia

By Alexei Pankin

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The views of Soviet dissident writer Alexander Zinovyev, much like his work and his life, cannot be categorized according to conventional ideas or stereotypes. And unlike the two other great Soviet-era dissidents, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov, Zinovyev, who died in 2006, was never formally canonized by Russia or the West. But successive reprints of his books consistently sell out, proving that he is a literary treasure.

His thoughts on perestroika and the post-Communist development of Russia could be summed up in the following excerpts from his 1976 book "Yawning Heights":

- The Soviet people will not fight communism. Dissidents are not a danger to the system. Only Soviet leaders have the power to destroy communism if they start reforms that disrupt the entire system of government.
- The Party, Komsomol and labor unions at the level of the workplace constitute Soviet civil society. If those are removed, it will cause the collapse of the system and society as

a whole because there is nothing else holding it together.
- You cannot build a skyscraper from the wreckage of an old barn – only another, even shakier barn.

Zinovyev, who was born 90 years ago, exposed the failings of the Soviet system in much the same way as Solzhenitsyn did in "Gulag Archipelago."

"Yawning Heights" is the first and best-known work in which Zinovyev describes "real communism" — that is, the way communism actually worked, as compared to the version proclaimed by government propaganda. After its first publication in the West in 1976, Zinovyev, a world-renowned scholar and former combat pilot who had served throughout all of World War II, was stripped of his academic credentials, military honors and Soviet citizenship and expelled from the Soviet Union.

At a recent news conference, his widow, Olga Zinovyeva, revealed a fascinating KGB document from that period. The first part contains a note to the Central Committee signed by then-KGB chief and later Soviet leader Yury Andropov detailing all of the harm Zinovyev had done to the Soviet Union. The second part explains why the best way to curtail Zinovyev's anti-Soviet activity was not to send him to a hard labor camp or a psychiatric hospital but to expel him from the country. According to his widow, Andropov saved Zinovyev.

"Many years later," Olga Zinovyeva said, "we learned that a copy of 'Yawning Heights' lay on his [Andropov's] table filled with underlining and commentaries." Apparently, even the most well-informed Communist in the Soviet Union had something to learn from Zinovyev about how the system really worked.In his university years, Zinovyev had planned to assassinate Josef Stalin. The only thing that saved him from being arrested was his decision to volunteer for the army.

Later in life, however, Zinovyev said Stalin had to use inhuman measures to provide education and opportunities to millions of people who, like himself, hailed from remote villages and provinces and to lift the Soviet Union from the chaos and collapse of the post-revolutionary period to become a superpower — one that emerged victorious from the horrors of World War II.

Yet, Zinovyev was not trying to justify Stalin's methods. "He simply explained the phenomenon of Stalinism. When you set out to analyze something, there is no room for emotion," Olga Zinovyeva said.

Having observed the experiments that liberals and so-called democrats conducted with post--Soviet Russia, Zinovyev quipped that he "was aiming at communism but hit Russia."

The Izborsky Club, which brings together leading analysts such as economists Sergei Glazyev, Mikhail Delyagin and Mikhail Leontyev and journalist Alexander Prokhanov, are developing an alternative to the liberals' plan for Russia's development. Notably, they are reportedly planning to name the club in honor of Zinovyev.

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