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## WHO ARE YOU, COMRADE ZYUGANOV?

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According to recent polls in Russia, Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov ranks first among the Russian presidential candidates. President Boris Yeltsin, ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, social democrat Grigory Yavlinski, retired general Alexander Lebed, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, and six other candidates are also competing for Russia's top job. On June 16, Zyuganov has a good chance of receiving a plurality of the vote—roughly 30 percent. This percentage could allow him to participate in a runoff election four weeks later against the other highest vote-getter (most likely President Yeltsin).

Zyuganov's constituency consists largely of those who have lost out during Russia's progress toward a free-market economy and democracy. These people—primarily the elderly, the unemployed, and unskilled workers who lack higher education—are motivated not so much by communist ideology as by the hardships of day-to-day living and disappointment in the reform process. It is difficult to convince them that the communist pledges of a welfare state cannot be implemented, and that the social safety net promised by Zyuganov will require funds that are not available. The only way to raise these funds would be through a major increase in the money supply, which also would lead to hyper-inflation and even more economic hardship.

Zyuganov claims to be the leader of a broad "national-patriotic" coalition and is supported by non-communist nationalist figures, such as influential Duma deputies Sergei Baburin and Alexei Podberezkin. One of the chief ideologists of Russian imperialism and militarism, Alexander Prokhanov, is among his staunchest allies.<sup>1</sup> His political platform is a bizarre mixture of populist, communist, and Russian nationalist rhetoric that clearly implies a "communist revenge"—turning the clock back to government ownership of Russia's industrial assets, aggressive regulation of the economy by the central government, fixed prices and wages, rationing and shortages of consumer goods, the stifling of basic freedoms, and strict control over the mass media, in addition to a new military buildup and renewed confrontation with the West. It is highly doubtful that such objectives can be achieved peacefully.

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1 Prokhanov is the editor of the ultra-nationalist newspaper *Zavtra* (Tomorrow).

If Zyuganov wins the presidential election, the potential for violence, both internally (as the communists move to crush the opposition) and externally (as Russia takes a more aggressive stance toward its neighbors and the West), will increase. The resulting destabilization could have dramatic ramifications both for Russian and U.S. vital interests. As president of Russia, Zyuganov not only would lead his country down the road of more confrontation with the U.S. and the West, but might even exaggerate his differences with the West to mobilize popular support and resentment at home.

## **WHO ARE YOU, DR. ZYUGANOV?**

On June 26, 1996, Zyuganov will be 52 years old. He was born in the village of Mymrino in the Central Russian region of Oryol, about 200 miles southwest of Moscow. The son of rural school teachers, he enjoyed higher social status, better living standards, and a richer intellectual environment than the other village children; but the post-collectivization and post-World War II hardships also affected his childhood. He graduated with honors from high school at age 17 and immediately began teaching. Zyuganov wed one of his pupils and now has two married children.

In 1962, Zyuganov became a student at the physics and mathematics department of the local teachers college in Oryol. Less than a year later, while still a freshman, he was drafted into the army. Zyuganov served two years in a special nuclear and chemical reconnaissance unit of the Soviet troops stationed in East Germany and was sent to perform decontamination work in the South Urals after a major nuclear catastrophe in the late 1950s (a disaster hushed up by the Soviet authorities for decades). He apparently was exposed to nuclear radiation while serving in this unit.

Zyuganov proceeded along the typical Soviet *nomenklatura* career path. At the age of 21, while still serving in the army, he joined the Communist Party (CPSU). The fact that he was drafted into the party at such a young age indicates that he was very disciplined, politically astute and loyal, on good terms with his superiors, and sufficiently pragmatic to anticipate the benefits of early Communist Party affiliation. After resuming his studies at the college, he became a Young Communist League (Komsomol) activist and quickly went on to become a full-time functionary heading the Oryol city and regional committee. In 1974, he became a regional Communist Party deputy chief, responsible for day-to-day running of the region and for ideological questions.

In 1978, he began postgraduate work at the prestigious Academy of Social Sciences under the Communist Party Central Committee, then the center of political training for top Communist Party *apparatchiks*. Recommendations from powerful superiors were needed to enter. He earned a Candidate (Ph.D.) at the Academy and 14 years later became a Doctor of Science in Philosophy.

Completing the postgraduate course at the Academy of Social Sciences boosted his party career and allowed him to network with powerful Central Committee staff members. Soon Zyuganov was transferred to Moscow to become a bureaucrat in the CPSU Central Committee's omnipotent Propaganda Department (later renamed the Ideological Department). The Propaganda Department monitored and shaped the nation's communist indoctrination and exercised strict ideological control over all aspects of life in the USSR. In 1990, toward the end of his party career, Zyuganov was promoted to the position of deputy head of the Propaganda Department, but the fall of the Soviet Union prevented him from becoming one of the top decision makers. Moreover, the department lost influence during the perestroika years under Mikhail Gorbachev. These were not easy times for Gennady Zyuganov. He had to maneuver between his direct superior, Secretary for Ideology of the Central Committee Alexander N. Yakovlev— the liberal “architect of perestroika”— and hard-line Politburo Secretary Yegor K. Ligachev, who opposed Gorbachev's policies of glasnost.

Zyuganov made his final choice in favor of the hard-line communists in 1990 when he joined the newly established Communist Party of the Russian Federation, which brought together all of Gorbachev's militant opponents. Zyuganov was immediately elected to the new party governing bodies and became one of the chief ideologists of the anti-democratic and anti-reform forces in Russia,

working to consolidate them under his own leadership within the “national patriotic movement,” a motley coalition of anti-Western, anti-reform, and anti-Semitic organizations.

Zyuganov co-authored the infamous “Word to the People” appeal, a declaration which called for reversing reforms, preserving the Soviet Union, and putting down the independence movements in the republics. Published in July of 1991 in the hard-line media — for example, in such newspapers as *Pravda*, *Segodnya*, and *Sovetskaya Rossiya*— this declaration became an ideological basis for the August 1991 abortive coup, which was an attempt to restore totalitarianism in Russia.

What Zyuganov wrote in words, he did not implement in practice, being personally either cautious or cowardly. His behavior during and after the 1991 coup significantly tainted his political image among the communists. Despite his authorship of the “Word to the People,” he neither actively supported the attempt nor opposed the subsequent banning of communist parties. In fact, the ban scared Zyuganov so much that he chose to lie low for a time.

The unemployed Zyuganov found asylum with the “Russian-American University” (RAU-Corporation),<sup>2</sup> a center which became a rallying point for “national-patriotic” forces favoring a return to Russia’s lost superpower status and “special way of development.” The U.S. Department of State denounced the RAU, calling it a CPSU and KGB front organization, and recommended that American government and private agencies refrain from contacts with it.<sup>3</sup> Zyuganov plunged into the study of nationalist rhetoric. Alexander Barkashov, leader of the neo-fascist “Russian National Unity” party, once admitted that he had guided Zyuganov in mastering such concepts as the “Russian Idea” and “the Revival of the National Identity.”<sup>4</sup> These are shorthand for Russia’s special national mission, geopolitical domination, and supposed racial superiority.

The fact that no anti-communist purge took place after the 1991 coup attempt encouraged Zyuganov to resume his political activities. In 1992, he chaired such left-wing and ultranationalist organizations as the Council of Popular Patriotic Forces, the Duma of the Russian National Council, and the National Salvation Council, which vehemently opposed President Yeltsin’s reform policies and called for his impeachment. He and his associates also filed a complaint in the Constitutional Court questioning the legitimacy of the presidential decree which had banned the Communist Party. Zyuganov and his comrades won, and the Russian Communist Party’s legal status was restored in 1993. Now successful, he was elected Chairman of the Party’s Central Executive Committee in February 1993.

In 1993, Zyuganov helped exacerbate the confrontation between Yeltsin and the “red-brown” opposition which had concentrated in the Russian Supreme Soviet, the old Russian parliament held over from the days of the Soviet Union. The conflict reached a tragic climax in October 1993 with fierce clashes between pro-government forces and opposing rebel fighters in Moscow’s streets as the seat of the Russian parliament (the White House) was shelled and stormed by the army. However, Zyuganov avoided direct participation in this mutiny as well, and even condemned the appeal made by its leaders for a general strike. By standing aloof, Zyuganov managed to avoid trouble and run for the State Duma (new parliament) in the December 12, 1993, elections. Other militant opposition leaders had been banned from these elections. Curiously, Zyuganov ran while decrying the illegitimacy of the new Duma, condemning what he called the “presidential coup” which had dissolved the Supreme Soviet.

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2 RAU should not be confused with the liberal educational establishment founded by Edward and Tatyana Lozansky and bearing the same name.

3 Personal interviews.

4 Alexander Golovenko, “Kovarstvo i ljubov. Gennady Zyuganov kak zerkalo politicheskoi prostitutsii,” *Moskovski Komsomolets*, March 12, 1996.

**Architect of the Communist Comeback.** The December 1993 election to the first State Duma of Russia put Zyuganov in the leadership position within the Duma's third-largest faction, after reformist Yegor Gaidar's "Russia's Choice" and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's ultranationalist Liberal Democrats. For the next three years, as he continued his unequivocal and belligerent criticism of the government, his popularity continued to rise. On December 17, 1995, in the second Duma elections, Zyuganov's Communist Party received 22 percent of the votes in the Duma. He was now the leader of its largest faction.

## THE WORLD ACCORDING TO COMRADE ZYUGANOV

Zyuganov's newly emerged philosophy has little to do with traditional Marxist-Leninist communism. Rather, it is a concoction of statist, nationalist, messianic, populist, and even religious Russian Orthodox slogans based on a profound mistrust of the West. Believing that the Western way of development can lead only to a historical dead end, Zyuganov proposes "a breakthrough to a new socio-economic system built on the great Russian cultural and historical heritage."<sup>5</sup> However, he never specifies exactly what the elements of such a system would be and seems to ignore the fact that all attempts to achieve such a "breakthrough" under the Bolsheviks failed, generating disasters that exhausted Russia and resulted in the worse crisis the country had experienced since 1917.

Zyuganov has no firsthand knowledge of the West and speaks no foreign languages, but his background, upbringing, and adult experiences have prejudiced him against what he calls "Western capitalism." He is susceptible to anti-Western conspiracy theories that circulate regularly among Russian communists and nationalists. These speculations lay the blame for all Russia's current hardships at the feet of "American imperialism" and its mysterious "agents of influence" in Russia, as well as Jews and Freemasons. Zyuganov claimed in 1995, for example, that the Soviet Union was dismembered as the result of a U.S. National Security Council directive adopted by John F. Kennedy after the Cuban Missile Crisis. He also believes that the purportedly secret "memoranda #1, 2, 3" drafted for George Bush were part of this strategy to undo the Soviet Union. He says that he obtained this information from a classified CPSU Central Committee "Special File" (*Osobaya Papka*) containing top secret documents allegedly obtained through intelligence channels.<sup>6</sup> However, Zyuganov's relatively low position in the CPSU Ideological Department would not have given him access to top secret documents intended only for Politburo members.

Over the past few years, Zyuganov's aides and speechwriters have tried to blunt his anti-Western image. He often has tried to incorporate Western examples or ideas to buttress his essentially anti-Western points of view. For example, Zyuganov argued in 1994 that "Some pro-American people in this country demand that we should move towards private ownership and a limited government. But the U.S. itself rejects such an approach. Back in 1933 Franklin D. Roosevelt summoned 200 leading American industrialists and told them: 'You should share 50 percent of your income with the government or we will have an October Revolution on our hands in no time.'"<sup>7</sup>

Zyuganov's political campaign is based on inflaming political passions created by difficulties with the reform process. He is an alarmist who repeatedly predicts "disaster," "collapse," the "disintegration" of Russia, the extinction of the population, the humiliation of the nation, and total impoverishment.<sup>8</sup> In his anti-Yeltsin rhetoric, he persistently condemns the government as "anti-people,"

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5 Otto Latsis, "KPRF—partiya antivybora Rossii," *Izvestiya*, February 10, 1996.

6 "Vystupleniye v sude G. A. Zyuganova," in *G. A. Zyuganov i o G. A. Zyuganove*, Perm, 1995, p. 37.

7 Personal interview.

8 Victor Khamrayev, "Gennady Zyuganov: KPRF privedet k vlasti upravlentsev-professionalov," *Segodnya*, August 29, 1995.

carefully avoiding the fact that most of Russia's present difficulties emerged long before the reforms were started, under the communist regime of Mikhail Gorbachev. His favorite theme is that Russia is dying out, losing one million souls annually. He shuns statistics testifying to the contrary—for example, that the mortality rate in 1995 dropped dramatically, while the birth rate grew for the first time since the 1970s.<sup>9</sup>

**No Repentance.** Russian Communists like Zyuganov have never acknowledged or repented of the massive crimes committed against the nation by their predecessors. On the contrary, Zyuganov praises Vladimir Lenin, who personally ordered the shooting of thousands of innocent citizens, as “the most outstanding leader who unerringly felt Russia's deepest sorrows and needs.”<sup>10</sup>

Zyuganov does not praise Stalin outright, but he also allows no official communist criticism of him.<sup>11</sup> He claims that there was no Soviet repression in the post-World War II period<sup>12</sup> and that there are more victims of repression in prisons today than under Stalin.<sup>13</sup> Zyuganov once told the German magazine *Der Spiegel* that only two persons were arrested in his native village in the post-World War II period, and that both were hardened criminals. In fact, however, many in this village perished during Stalin's purges.<sup>14</sup> Zyuganov even denies that former Soviet leaders like Leonid Brezhnev and Yuri Andropov ever sent political dissidents to the Gulag and special psychiatric prisons.

**Zyuganov's Electoral Platform.** Zyuganov's electorate is stable and will vote for him under any circumstances. Thus, his main objective is to draw in those who are still undecided. Thus far, he has failed to produce a comprehensive program that encompasses all the views of the “broad national patriotic coalition,” but his electoral platform, published in March 1996, undoubtedly is not as clear-cut as the secret Program Maximum (set of ultimate political goals) designed for internal communist consumption. While publicly Zyuganov makes no mention of nationalizing privatized property, the party program calls for “nationalization or confiscation of the property acquired against the law, national interests and the rights of working people.”<sup>15</sup> Presumably, the Communist Party will assume the prerogative of determining exactly what those interests and rights are. The newly published communist economic plan, unveiled in Moscow on May 28, calls for reversal of privatization which was executed “through violation of law” and allows meager private ownership limited to apartments, small garden plots, and small service businesses. The program, if implemented, would reverse the achievements of four years of economic reform and severely injure both Russian and Western private-sector interests.

Indeed, Zyuganov does not offer Russia any sort of positive future. What he does pledge is a return to the communist past: economic regulation by the government, state monopoly of foreign trade, state ownership of land with no right to sell or buy property, government subsidies for bankrupt and uncompetitive industries, and restoration of the former Soviet Union.

Zyuganov accuses the present government of destroying people's savings by devaluing the currency. To remedy this problem, he has promised to reimburse people for their losses. However, he overlooks the fact that most of the devaluation and confiscation of the currency occurred under the communist governments of former Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov and Prime Minister Va-

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9 Latsis, “KPRF—partiya antivybora Rossii.”

10 G. A. Zyuganov *i o G. A. Zyuganove*, p. 134.

11 *Newsweek*, March 11, 1996.

12 *Ibid.*

13 G. Zyuganov, “Ya ros posle voiny i v moyo vremya repossyiy ne bylo,” *Izvestiya*, March 5, 1996.

14 Elena Yakovleva, “Khotelos by vsyekh poimanno nazvat, da otnyali spisok,” *Izvestiya*, March 3, 1996.

15 Otto Latsis, “Maksi-minimum Zyuganova,” *Izvestiya*, March 29, 1996.

lentin Pavlov in 1990-1991, before the reforms were launched. Nor do Zyuganov and the authors of his economic plan explain where they will get the money to restore the people's savings.

Zyuganov's platform lacks clear and specific legislative proposals and policy guidelines. Instead, it contains numerous clichés: for example, "power should be returned to the people"; "children should get everything they are deprived of"; "women will rear children with confidence in their future"; and "talented people should be backed by the government."<sup>16</sup> The communist election platform conceals rather than elucidates the policies Zyuganov would pursue if elected. Many in Moscow believe that Zyuganov himself does not know.

But some of his comrades believe they know. A group of communist Duma members in the spring of 1996 drafted a law "On Emergency Measures to Extricate Russia from the Crisis and to Ensure Its Socio-Economic Development." This is blatant anti-reform manifesto envisages:

- X **Restoration** of the government central planning system under a reestablished committee (Gos-Plan);
- X **Review** of all legislation on privatization (with a view to stopping or reversing all privatization);
- X **Restoration** of government ministries to manage industries;
- X **Regulation** of wholesale and retail prices;
- X **High protectionist** tariffs on imports;
- X **Increased** taxation;
- X **Modernization** of Russia's defense industries and increased manufacture of armaments;
- X **Massive government subsidies** for the agricultural sector; and
- X **Censorship** of the mass media.<sup>17</sup>

The new communist economic plan issued for public consumption before the elections is a watered-down version of this legislation. Deeply rooted in anti-Western and anti-market ideology, the plan promises retreat from market reforms, the imposition of protectionism, and greatly increased government spending for industrial and agricultural subsidies and a social safety net.

Another communist idea is the restoration of the USSR, which under present circumstances would mean an attempt to rebuild a Russian empire hostile to its neighbors, both near and far. On March 15, 1996, communists in the Duma denounced the 1991 Belovezh agreement on the dismantling of the USSR. This move has caused great concern on the part of Russia's neighbors and other Western countries.

**Appearing to Conciliate the West.** Zyuganov realizes that if he becomes president, he will still be dependent on Western loans and investments to keep the Russian economy afloat. Thus, particularly when addressing a Western audience, he does his utmost to mask his real intentions. He and his deputies currently are campaigning to convince Western politicians and the Western public that communists are harmless and that their ascension to power would strengthen democracy in Russia and improve the climate for foreign investment. This was the central theme of Zyuganov's message at the February 1996 Davos World Economic Forum in Switzerland,<sup>18</sup> at which he claimed that com-

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16 *Rossiia, Rodina, Narod, Predvybornaya platforma kandidata na dolzhnost prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii Zyuganova Gennadiya Andreyevicha*, Moscow, 1996, p. 22.

17 Georgi Bovt and Natalia Kalashnikova, "Kommunisticheski manifest-96," *Kommersant-Daily*, April 13, 1996.

18 Mikhail Berger, "Na davosskom 'izbiratel'nom uchastke' v Shveitsarii proshli debaty kandidatov v rossiiskie presidenty," *Izvestiya*, February 6, 1996.

munists accept all forms of ownership of property and are simply trying to find the appropriate combination of private and state property for Russia. However, when U.S. Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ) asked what he proposed to do to protect private property, Zyuganov avoided a direct answer.<sup>19</sup>

Zyuganov's messages to the West contrast sharply with his statements designed for domestic consumption. His party's internal program clearly stands for ultimate control of all property by the government. However, he does not make this point when talking to foreigners. During a recent meeting with International Monetary Fund leaders, Zyuganov neglected to mention his interview last year in the Russian nationalist paper *Zavtra* (Tomorrow), in which he likened the IMF emissaries to Nazi regional leaders (Gauleiters) in Russia during World War II.<sup>20</sup> Anatoly Chubais, Russia's former First Deputy Premier and architect of Yeltsin's privatization program, while speaking at the Davos forum in February warned that if the West flirted with Zyuganov, it would be responsible for the bloodshed that could well occur if the communists moved to renationalize private property. The only way communists can implement their true plans is through violence, said Chubais; they will never confine themselves solely to declarations.

Any comparison of Zyuganov to Central and East European leftist leaders is misleading. The former communists in Hungary and Poland show clear signs of having adjusted to the noncommunist political and economic system. The Russian communists do not.

**Intraparty Challenges.** Unlike Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the authoritarian leader of the ultra-nationalist Liberal-Democratic Party, Gennady Zyuganov is being challenged for the leadership both of his own party and of its Duma faction. His main rival is Communist Party Chief of Staff Valentin Kuptsov, who was a contender for the chairmanship in 1993. Kuptsov, who is sophisticated and exercises strict control over the party staff, reportedly is supported by two-thirds of the party's members and by more than half of its Duma faction. Kuptsov is even more hard-line than Zyuganov and could be an even tougher adversary for Russian reformers and for the West if he ever seized power.

Gennady Seleznyov, former chief editor of *Pravda* and Communist speaker of the State Duma, also has increased his influence significantly within the party. Even if Zyuganov should win the presidency, a possible shift of power to the parliament could leave him scrambling for support among Duma and party members controlled by Kuptsov and Seleznyov.

Many of Zyuganov's allies in the Duma are more ideologically moderate and better integrated into the present Russian establishment than the rest of the party. In fact, many of Zyuganov's supporters are not dyed-in-the-wool communists, but bureaucrats who feel deprived of the opportunities for quick enrichment which privatization and corruption have brought so many other bureaucrats in Yeltsin's administration.

## CONCLUSION

In the long run, Russian policy under Zyuganov could be expected to recreate a major threat to America's interests and those of its European allies. Zyuganov's promise (made in December 1995 after the Duma elections) to invade Estonia if NATO is expanded to the Baltics, his declarations that only a reconstituted Soviet Union is capable of confronting the United States, and his deeply rooted hostility to the West all would tend to make his government assume an almost viscerally confrontational posture toward the Euro-Atlantic community should he become president of Russia.

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19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

There are policymakers around Zyuganov who advocate Russia's aggressive involvement in the Middle East, including supporting arms sales to existing and future radical and fundamentalist regimes in the region. The fate of the world's largest oil reserves would be at stake if Moscow again attempted to destabilize the Middle East.

If they put their campaign rhetoric into practice, Zyuganov and his team would move to reverse the outcome of the Cold War by attempting to build an anti-American coalition with Iran and China. Such a development undoubtedly would trigger a massive military buildup, both in the East and in the West, as arms control agreements with Russia unraveled.

Paradoxically, if Zyuganov came to power, the effect probably would be to accelerate NATO expansion to the East, as the West would interpret his election as an increased threat from Russia. The likely communist response to NATO expansion is predictable: confrontation with the West, intimidation of neighboring countries, and threats of a nuclear and conventional military buildup.