



Zinovy Zinik

Manifesto for the dawn of communism

Communism isn't an ideology but a religion; like Christianity, it has its saints, its scriptures, and its iconography. And like the early Christians, the job of the faithful is to bring light to the world in the diaspora. Yes, Soviet Communism is just getting started. At least that's how it seems to Zinovy Zinik, propping up the bar of the Museum Tavern, across the road from the British Museum.

The route followed by Karl Marx day after day as he proceeded to the Reading Room of the British Museum to study capitalism took him past Assyrio-Babylonian monsters half-man, half-bird which are sandwiched between sarcophagi with mummies from ancient Egypt. The same route was repeated later by Lenin as he proceeded to the study of Marx's *Das Kapital*. Lenin finished up at the end of his days in an Egyptian pyramid build by the Assyrio-Babylonian Moscow, monsters of the Marxist ideology. My acquaintance with the mummy of Lenin, which should properly have occurred when I was a schoolboy in the Pioneers, was frustrated by mumps, or was it chickenpox; and when I reached years of discretion, by anti-Soviet snobbery. Who could have imagined that I should finally enter the Mausoleum a confirmed émigré, with a letter in my pocket signed by Her Britannic Majesty's ambassador, requesting that I be admitted without having to stand in the queue.

As it happened, there was no queue for the Mausoleum. On the day appointed, Red Square was sealed off by militia and crush barriers on the occasion, as I discovered, of the latest demonstration by those supporting a restoration of Soviet power. Because of the demonstration, the barriers, and the militia, few people realized that the Mausoleum was still open. The Mausoleum was freely accessible, even to those without ambassadorial letters. The soldiers of the guard of honour moved as usual with the requisite jerky ritual gestures, freezing periodically with one leg suspended in mid-air. That leg held in dog-like suspense suggested that they might be about to urinate on the steps and desecrate the shrine. I smiled at this blasphemous image, but as I looked back one last time at Red Square, lit by the April sunshine, and marched off down the stairs, that shadow of a smile which had been playing on my lips began to fade with every step.

We emerged into the unfamiliar, topsy-turvy, infernal world on the other side of the looking-glass. What had seemed from the outside to be a pyramid proved to be only the vault of the Mausoleum roof. The actual tomb extended downwards, a pit-like mirror image of the pyramid above. Suspended over the pit of the inverted pyramid was Lenin's coffin, supported by a concealed cantilever so that it seemed to be hovering. The coffin was made of glass. You had first to descend some steps and then climb upwards again to find yourself level with the transparent sarcophagus. This descending and ascending, combined with disorientating lighting that equated the upper pyramid to the abyss of its reflection underfoot, caused you to lose all sense of up and down.

The mummy seemed to hover between heaven and earth, like a transvestite version of Sleeping Beauty.

I had been expecting something familiar to me from our Soviet school textbook: the bearded, ascetic face, the polka-dot tie, the arms crossed peacefully on his chest. What reclined beneath the transparent coffin lid, however, was a lurid grandee of yellow wax, translucent as amber, and with the puffed-up face of a Buddhist bronze. One hand was convulsively clenched into a fist, the other extended pincer-like, as if he had frozen, biding his time to leap up, shatter the glass lid with a waxen fist, and hurl himself at the crowd of gaping renegades (his favourite epithet). Our moment of communion with the Leader lasted an instant or two and we were, shameful to relate, ready to step back into the abyss and on out to the exit when a woman in the file in front unexpectedly halted. I saw her eyes dilate and her cheekbones bulge as she clenched her teeth. Without pausing for breath, she addressed the mummy in a loud and plaintive voice: "Forgive us, Comrade Lenin, for failing to live up to your expectations." Marshals materialized instantly, the woman was expertly pinioned, and politely but firmly propelled towards the exit. I too, a former member of the Young Communist League who was nowadays an émigré, had failed to live up to Comrade Lenin's expectations.

As I moved over Red Square, I passed a solitary figure, who might have been a beggar or a demonstrator, but proved in fact to be a lunatic with half a sandwich board. He was standing quite motionless, as if in imitation of the Mausoleum guards opposite. His face looked as if he had just hanged himself. The text of the protest suspended from the rope round his neck claimed that the agents of *perestroika* had invaded his brain, and were secretly extracting the lymph from his ducts. The message concluded: "After all these tortures, nothing is left in my head but thoughts of sex. Save me or kill me!"

The mention of sex was not accidental in this maniac's protest. Lenin had died of syphilis of the brain. The Father of the Russian Revolution was transformed into an Egyptian mummy. (The act coincided in time with the discovery in the tomb of Tutankhamen.) The mummy itself, the embodiment of the eternal Soviet soul (plundered by the agents of *perestroika*), was said to be recoated periodically with a wax solution to prevent decomposition: once a week for the face and hands, a couple of times a year for the rest of the body, not forgetting, presumably, the naughty bits. I had heard tales of a mythical Research Institute of the Mummy of Lenin where a tank the length of the wall was located, in which there floated ears and noses, hands and feet: spare parts for the bits of the mummy on public display. And once he had had a companion down there. What did Lenin and Stalin get up to, I wonder, lying there in their pyramid side by side in the dark? Those camp leather jackets which were the Chekists' uniform... All that French-kissing between members of the Politburo, hugging each other in public... And while their right hands were raised aloft in greeting during the Red Square parades, what of their left hands hidden beneath the Mausoleum parapet? Perhaps that was why I had steered clear of the Mausoleum, where they told you to take your hands out of your pockets. Perhaps it was all an adolescent horror of deviant Bolshevik sex. Men of the Majority, they had dubbed themselves in London in 1903, but were they not, more probably, in reality sexual Mensheviks? It was like being back at Pioneer camp, with the warden shouting at you to keep your hands above the sheets (lest Soviet Pioneers be tempted).

The madman whose sex-obsessed mind was plundered by the agents of *perestroika* was not alone on the square. There was a crowd by the Historical

Museum, the first contingent of supporters of a restoration of Soviet power, the casualties of the dispossessed Soviet belief system. They had been represented to me as an ideological monstrosity, but what I saw were careworn, sunken faces; distraught, badly dressed people in their 50s and 60s whose body language betrayed how lacking they were in aplomb. These were people who had had their lives, their victories and defeats taken away from them, along with their treasured Party Member's Burden. An old dear in a coat with what looked like a cat-fur collar was going round with a collecting box. It had been fashioned from a breadbin with a transparent lid, and had a slot for money, and portraits of Lenin and Stalin, Marx and Engels stuck on the back. The finished product resembled nothing so much as a rustic Nativity crib with the Holy Family at Christmas, and I suddenly registered the religious nature of the protest of these, the reviled and poor in spirit. I recognized in this crowd of those persecuted for righteousness' sake a nucleus of disciples of a hitherto unknown religious cult.

"Forgive us, Comrade Lenin, for failing to live up to your expectations." The plaint of the woman in the pyramid was ringing in my ears. Egyptian Pyramid. Exodus from Egypt. Emigration. I too have failed to live up to your expectations, *Tovarishch* Lenin. I have betrayed the Soviet motherland by scampering off into emigration. Or have I, perhaps, on the contrary, repeated your own path, returning after years of exile to Red Square, the Promised Land of the chosen Soviet people who have been left bereft by the Roman legionaries of *perestroika*? My mind was in turmoil and, unable to restrain myself, I dropped into the Soviet demonstrators' home-made collecting box an English pound note (one and a half dollars). What an impact! I was surrounded by people asking where I was from. When they discovered I was from London, they began chanting "London-Moscow! Moscow-London! Solidarity! Solidarity!" The tears welled in my eyes. All the threads had come together in my mind. The British Museum, the Egyptian Gallery, Lenin and Marx, Moscow and London, inward freedom and capitalism, emigration and the fatherland, that woman and that man.

Since that episode, each time I retired after a visit to the British Museum Reading Room across the road to the Museum Tavern for a pint of ale or a dram of whisky, the idea whose faint glimmerings had first visited me in Red Square began gradually to clothe itself in the words of a new manifesto. Here, after penning his daily quota of *Das Kapital*, Marx had sat behind his tankard. Here had Lenin sat after studying his daily quota of the pages of *Das Kapital*. Propping up the bar of the Museum Tavern, I now saw clearly that a spectre was again haunting Europe, the spectre of Soviet Communism. To an outside observer it might seem that all that remained of it was a heap of ruins, despoiled monuments, torn pages, tattered banners, and broken hearts. The colossus with feet of clay, which only recently had instilled fear and trembling, had given up the ghost. Whither had its ghost fled? Abroad, of course! To western Europe, into emigration, to the very place where it had been born in travail to the émigrés Marx and Lenin, within the portals of the Reading Room. The spectre of Communism is still haunting museum galleries.

Communism was, after all, like all things spiritual in Russia, the progeny of Western thought. For centuries, European idealists have tried out their utopian ideas on the Russian guinea pig. Western governments, in their turn, fearful of social upheaval at home, have encouraged Russia's enthusiasm for testing revolutionary theories in practice. The catastrophic results in Russia have duly frightened off the masses of the West and disposed them against firebrands advocating social change at home. To secure this result, European

governments were fully prepared to underpin Russia's flirtation with socialism with economic aid of various kinds. Eastern European Communism could not have survived without the financial support of western European capitalism. The decay of Communism points primarily to a decaying of capitalism, which has run out of money for funding expensive instructive experiments on other people's soil. The West's tightfistedness signals a spiritual crisis of the capitalist system, a disillusionment with utopian ideals, and indeed a disbelief in progress of any kind. And without faith in progress there can be no capitalism. Nothing is left but thoughts of sex.

Reports trumpeting the death of Soviet Communism are premature in the extreme. True, its body was destroyed with the dismantling of the Party's administrative apparatus. Soviet Communism never was, however, merely the ideology of the Communist Party. The Precepts of Lenin will live in our hearts though the Mausoleum become a McDonald's. The cult of Stalin's personality is in our souls. The eternal Khrushchev spring burgeons afresh in our breasts each year, while Brezhnev's lascivious Period of Stagnation will ever tickle at our groins.

Soviet Communism: *c'est nous*. When we heard of its death, were we not bereft? And ought not now all those of us who chortled in self-satisfaction, rubbed our hands in glee, squealed with delight, and ironically applauded every false step of Soviet power on its progress towards its suicidal dénouement, ought we not now publicly to prostrate ourselves before our spiritual flock for depriving them of their guiding star? Liberals pilloried Soviet Communism for its Stalinist antecedents exactly as the atheists before them tried to discredit the ideals of Christianity, by pointing accusingly at the horrors of the Inquisition. Communism, no less than Christianity, is not an ideology but a religion, and for that reason can neither be equated with nor judged by its historical record. The intoxication of revolutionary cataclysms, the high-minded fury against enemies of the people, the tremulous joy when we thought of the radiant future of all mankind, the tireless struggle for the moral evolution of Soviet man, and much, much more that is great and good, will live forever in our hearts.

Yes, the temple of Soviet Communism is laid waste and we its children are dispersed to the corners of the earth. Let us not forget, however, that a great religion can exist even without a temple or a territory. Let us regard ourselves in the light of the early Christians, those Jews who were exiled from the Holy Land by the pagan Romans, only to bring light to the world in the Diaspora. Let us lay the first stone for the foundation of a new synagogue in our Communist Diaspora. We have all we need to build anew the temple of Communism, only this time in our hearts. We have our Bible (*Das Kapital* and the works of Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev); we have our iconography (in the portraits of the founders of Marxism-Leninism and members of the Politburo); we even have our saints' calendar, with its holy days like the anniversary of the October Revolution, and our religious rituals like the public confessions of enemies of the people. For all that, we shall need jealously to guard the purity of our religious doctrine against idolatry and heresy. We must tirelessly unmask the dead shell of contemporary pharisaism in the guise of the Chinese communists, as we must excise the festering sore of European federalism which is trying to attach itself to the Communist fraternity of former Soviet peoples. These heretical tendencies we shall expose and anathematize in bulls and epistolae; and that we should not lose touch with each other, we shall gather every Sabbath in the prayer houses and synagogues we are building in every part of the world, starting across the road from the

British Museum, that the spectre of Communism should have somewhere to lay its head without being bothered by the agents of *perestroika* and thoughts of sex.

The era, proclaimed by the decadent Western press as the death of Communism, will go down in the memory of humankind as the time of the first revelations to its apostles, and we shall tell our grandchildren we were witnesses, not of the demise, but of the dawning of World Communism.

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