Introduction: The puzzles of 'patriotic' communism: Gennadi Zyuganov, the Russian Milosevic?

Lanskoy, Miriam
Boston University Center for the Study of Conflict, Ideology, and Policy

https://hdl.handle.net/2144/22589

Boston University
International attention has focused on Yel'tsin's Communist Party opponent in Russia's presidential elections, Gennadi Zyuganov. Rather than being merely another apparatchik, Zyuganov represents the anti-Western extreme, the ascendant ideology of imperial nationalism. Though his campaign pronouncements, especially when intended for foreign consumption, have endeavored to portray him as a moderate, his books tell a different story. (1) Zyuganov writes approvingly of Stalin, who, unlike Stalin's successors, he sees as having understood accurately Russia's historic mission, its Titanic struggle against the West. Contemptuous of liberal democracy, Zyuganov regards political pluralism and market economics as alien systems treacherously imposed on Russia by agents of the West. Instead he seeks to reverse the course of economic reform and to restore the Soviet Union, paving the way for Russia's re-emergence as the dominant Eurasian power.

When a candidate with such views garners popularity among large segments of the Russian electorate, further questions emerge. Is Russia in its current weakened state capable of sustaining Zyuganov's vision? Will he find fertile ground among the country's governing and intellectual elite to accomplish the reorientation in national priorities that he is seeking? Conversely, are Zyuganov's views merely a more adamant expression of an emerging consensus among Russia's policy-making elite? (2) After all, key aspects of Zyuganov's foreign policy priorities – reintegration of the Soviet Union and the establishment of closer relations with China and Middle Eastern states – already are being implemented by Yevgeni Primakov's Foreign Ministry. In Chechnya we have
ample evidence that Russia's diminished military remains capable of inflicting considerable suffering with little domestic or international censure.

To evaluate the threat to international security posed by the re-emergence of Russian imperial nationalism and to examine its roots in the Soviet past, the Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology, and Policy at Boston University presents Alexander Yanov's, "The Puzzles of Patriotic Communism: Gennadi Zyuganov, The Russian Milosevic?" Incorporating an illuminating account of Zyuganov's ideology and political strategy, this essay constitutes a novel analytical approach to the problem. Locating the emergence of the modern incarnation of the Russian "patriotic" idea in the Brezhnev period, Dr. Yanov suggests that for some in the top echelons of the CPSU it constituted the only means of lifting the Soviet Union from its technological backwardness and ideological decay. In this light, the course of Russian liberal democratic reform is hardly inevitable; on the contrary, the fortuitous circumstances that thwarted the implementation of the patriotic idea in the 1980s may not recur to prevent the heirs of the most dangerous faction within the CPSU from staging a comeback. As the central analogy to Serbia under Milosevic suggests, there is more than one path for post-communist states to follow, and the alternative to Russia's embryonic democracy can spell disaster.

Dr. Yanov is an author of piercing sustained vision and considerable courage who has made substantial contributions to the field of Soviet and post-Soviet affairs. A political writer widely published in the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s, he successfully defended his dissertation "The Slavophils and Konstantin Leont'yev" in 1970. In 1974, after his History of Political Opposition in Russia was taken to the West, attracting the intense interest of the KGB, he was offered the choice between emigration and prison. Since then he has authored numerous books and articles, chief among them, Džtente After Brezhnev: the Domestic Roots of Soviet Foreign Policy (1977); The Russian New Right (1978); The Origins of Autocracy: Ivan the Terrible in Russian History (1980); The Drama of...
the Soviet 1960s: A Lost Reform (1984) and The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000 (1987). Together these works constitute not only the most authoritative treatment of the "patriotic" thread in contemporary Russian politics but a unique approach to the study of Russian history. In his most recent work, published in Russian under the title of Beyond Yel'tsin and in English as Weimar Russia and What We Can Do About It (1995), Dr. Yanov employs the analogy of the demoralized, enfeebled post-World War I Germany to illustrate vividly the dangers inherent in Russia taking the "patriotic" road to recover what was "lost" in 1991.

Notes:


Copyright Boston University Trustees 1996
This article was originally published at https://www.bu.edu/iscip/pubseries/12intro.html.