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*ZINOVIEV RE-EXAMINED: COMMENTS  
ON LARS LIH'S "POPULIST LENINIST"*

In December 1925, perhaps as he sat watching the drama of the Fourteenth Party Congress, Valerii Mezhlauk sketched out a caricature of Grigorii Zinoviev. In the picture, Zinoviev, who holds suspended above a trunk two oversized puppets, one a rotund bourgeois urbanite and the other an equally plump well-to-do peasant, addresses his housemaid: "Masha, tonight is the plenum of the Central Committee. Please clean the kulak and the nepman, and, after I return, sprinkle them with mothballs.

Yes, I can use the plump well-to-do peasant, addresses his housemaid: "Masha, tonight is the plenum of the Central Committee. Please clean the kulak and the nepman, and, after I return, sprinkle them with mothballs. We won't need them until fall." Mezhlauk then scribbled on the back "To Zinoviev."<sup>1</sup>

Mezhlauk's witty charge struck at the beleaguered Leningrad party leader on several levels. First, no one could miss the irony of a communist leader ordering about a housemaid, though the presence of such help was not unusual among the party leadership. Zinoviev had developed a reputation for lavish living, witnessed in part by his transformation from a pale, sickly looking individual on his return to Russia with Lenin in April 1917, to the fleshy party boss he had since become.<sup>2</sup> Second (and more important), the drawing echoed V. Bogushevskii's infamous assertion, made only a few months prior, that the well-to-do peasant *kulak* (and, in Mezhlauk's rendition, the urban bourgeoisie) was merely a "bogey," meant to frighten the party away from conciliatory policies to encourage rural prosperity.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the implication of the second point was that Zinoviev's opposition to such policies was disingenuous, that the Leningrad leader knew full well that the revival of capi-

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1. Alexander Vatlin and Larisa Malashenko, eds., *Piggy Foxy and the Sword of the Revolution: Bolshevik Self-Portraits*, trans. By Vadim A. Staklo (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2006), p. 129.

2. Despite rumors, such characterizations can not entirely be trusted. Zinoviev suffered from poor health, which saved him from imprisonment in 1908 and which may account for fluctuations in his weight.

3. V. Bogushevskii, "O derevenskom kulake . . ." *Bol'shevik*, no. 9-10 (1925): 63.

talism in NEP was an exaggerated threat, and his positions were merely a political tactic.

The accusation that Zinoviev's politics were little more than unprincipled maneuvering for power has become part and parcel of his historical profile. Lars Lih undertakes, if not a defense, an effort to rescue Zinoviev from the charge, apparently leveled at him by Trotsky but repeated with additional insults in E. H. Carr's *Socialism in One Country*, that he was "vacillating" and inconsistent, an index of the superficiality of his political positions. Lih adds to Myron Hedlin's reassessment of Zinoviev in 1917, finding in the man's words and actions a steady effort to appeal to the broadest possible segments of Russian society by attacking "the wall" of bureaucratic apparatus between the working masses and party and by promoting state pressure on nepmen and *kulaks*. In this addendum to Lih's article, I will suggest that this "populist" line in Zinoviev represents a deep anxiety – and perhaps even lingering doubts – about genuine support for Bolshevik power.

E. H. Carr, in his 1958 profile of Zinoviev, adds to Trotsky's scorn the words of Stalin, suggesting that Zinoviev was "wobbling" and that his ideas amounted to "hysteria, not a policy," as well as Bukharin's slap at Zinoviev's inflated self-importance in his "epoch-making books."<sup>4</sup> Lih is right to point out that few, save Lunacharskii or Hedlin, have had a positive word for the man.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, in addition to Angelica Balabanoff's famous dismissal of Zinoviev as "after Mussolini . . . the most despicable individual I have ever met," we have Mary McAuley's description of him as "emotional, impetuous, 'inclined to panic under stress' according to his enemies, physically prone to puffiness, and, one feels, somewhat self-important,"<sup>6</sup> as well as Victor Serge's judgment that he was "a remarkable agitator, somewhat vulgar in tone, of whom it may be said that he was Lenin's greatest mistake."<sup>7</sup> Carr himself finds Zinoviev an intellectual lightweight and offers this assessment: "Zinoviev never succeeded in attaining either depth of conviction or depth of understanding; and this innate superficiality, among men who treated the sub-

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4. Edward Hallett Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia: Socialism in One Country 1924-1926*, (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 1: 156.

5. A. Lunacharskii, "Grigorii Evseevich Zinov'ev (Radomysl'skii)," in A. Lunacharskii *et al.*, *Silueti: Politicheskie portrety* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991), pp. 294-99. Note that Trotsky suggests that Lunacharskii only heaped praise on Zinoviev to elevate the latter's authority in Petrograd, where he was a relative newcomer when Lunacharskii wrote the piece in 1919. See L. Trotskii, *Moia zhizn': Opyt avtobiografii* (Moscow: Kniga, 1990), 2: 231 (reprint).

6. Mary McAuley, *Bread and Justice: State and Society in Petrograd, 1917-1922* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), p. 32.

7. Victor Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After*, trans. by Max Schachtman, rev. and ed. by Susan Weissman (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1996), p. 153.

tleties of doctrine with passionate earnestness, won him an uneviable reputation for shiftiness and lack of scruple."<sup>8</sup>

While chair of the Petrograd soviet and unofficial party boss of the city, rumors that Zinoviev spared himself no luxury, living in the Astoria hotel and appointing shiny new Packards for himself and his wife, were further supported by his expanding girth, even during the food-supply crisis of 1919.<sup>9</sup> His well-documented high-pitched voice and episodes, such as his "cold feet" prior to the October revolution or his reported panic at Iudenich's approach to Petrograd in 1919, add to the picture of a power-hungry petty tyrant whose true character was revealed in times of crisis as miserable and craven.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, some accounts of Zinoviev's final moments in 1936 confirm this maudlin image of evil, with the condemned man weeping hysterically and unable to walk to his place of execution.<sup>11</sup>

Given such a thorough indictment of Zinoviev's character flaws, how could such an individual come to occupy a position of prominence in the party and even be recognized as its most outstanding figure after Lenin and Trotsky? Lih himself refers to Zinoviev as "the principal spokesman for Bolshevism" in the early 1920s. For arch-critics, such a question has an obvious answer. The perfidy of the Bolshevik leadership requires no additional explanation, so the question is moot. Lenin and Trotsky were something on the order of evil geniuses, and Zinoviev owed his position to his slavish loyalty to Lenin (with the notable exception of his "betrayal" in October), his admitted rhetorical gifts, and the minor cult of personality that developed around him. Carr notes that Zinoviev worked tirelessly on behalf of the new regime, at times unwisely assuming too many responsibilities. And, Carr claims, Zinoviev's experience with Lenin in exile and his knowledge of German (famously demonstrated in a two-hour speech that roused the Independent Social Democrats to unite with the KPD in 1920) especially recommended him to his position of greatest achievement as head of the Comintern.<sup>12</sup>

But given the otherwise unsavory aspects of his character, it is difficult to understand how Zinoviev could have won the loyalty of others. Lev Kameney, whose name is most closely associated with Zinoviev's, shares few of his comrade's flaws and is generally treated with some sympathy. Likewise, Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, enjoyed a long association with Zinoviev,

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8. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, 1: 156.

9. McAuley, *Bread and Authority*, p. 153.

10. Note that Myron W. Hedlin provides a compelling refutation of the "cold feet" interpretation and calls into question the characterization of Zinoviev as "panicked" in 1919 in his article, "Zinoviev's Revolutionary Tactics in 1917," *Slavic Review* 34, no. 1 (March, 1975).

11. Donald Rayfield, *Stalin and His Hangmen: The Tyrant and Those Who Killed for Him* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 279.

12. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, 1: 158.

in whom she confided as the struggle against Stalin's growing power intensified. Finally, can we conclude that the Leningrad party leadership was drawn to Zinoviev only by virtue of his power?

At present there seems no need to rework the historical record to make a revolutionary saint of Grigorii Zinoviev. Even though most of the negative appraisals have either come from his obvious political opponents or have been based on those accounts, the volume of material attesting to his faults would make such a task a Sisyphean endeavor. Nevertheless, Lih's re-examination of Zinoviev's record of political positions, while not whitewashing the blemishes of his personal character, does suggest that we should take a second look not only at Zinoviev but at the nature of the debates that rent the party in the 1920s.

Before we look more closely at the substance of Lih's argument, it is worth pausing for a moment on the accusation of inconsistency itself and why it might be relevant to our understanding of intraparty feuds of the 1920s. Carr presents perhaps the fullest elaboration of Zinoviev in this regard; but it is important to note that the charge of vacillation he offers comes primarily from Trotsky, who, despite his brief alliance with Zinoviev in 1926-27, had little reason to look with favor on the former triumvir.<sup>13</sup> Zinoviev emerged as the chief conspirator against Trotsky in 1923, and together with Kamenev he turned the neologism "Trotskyism" into a term of opprobrium, equating it with Menshevism.<sup>14</sup> Until early 1925, Zinoviev was the principal voice in the campaign against Trotsky, a dubious honor for which he established a pattern of calumny that would ultimately be used against him. By the time Trotsky wrote *Moia zhizn'* in 1930, Zinoviev had bowed to party discipline and renounced his opposition and union with Trotsky, so there is no surprise that Trotsky should have seen in him an unreliable ally. In addition, however, Trotsky believed (as have historians since) that Zinoviev changed his position with regard to NEP, shifting from championship of the peasantry (indeed, his main charge against Trotsky had been "neglect of the peasantry") to the left opposition's calls to accumulate resources on behalf of industry, thus favoring the working class.<sup>15</sup>

But rather than take Trotsky's position for granted, we should look closely at Carr's choice of translation from Trotsky's memoir. Carr selects "incorrigible vacillations" for the Russian *neizbezhnye kolebaniia*. Such a choice might be warranted if Trotsky had repeatedly referred to the instability of Zi-

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13. Trotsky, *Moia zhizn'*, 2: 273.

14. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, 1: 155, gives the credit for the term to Zinoviev. Alexis Pogorelskin, however, disputes that claim, attributing its first use to Kamenev.

15. Robert Vincent Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), p. 261.

noviev's positions in his text. When Carr couples it with Stalin's charge of "wobbling" at the fourteenth party congress, such a translation appears justified. But the two accusations refer to different moments in different contexts. Stalin's concerned what he believed was Zinoviev's turnabout on peasant policy between the fourteenth conference in April 1925, the October plenum of that same year, and the fourteenth congress in December.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Trotsky was writing of Zinoviev's *neizbeznyye kolebaniia* with regard to Comintern relations with the British Trade Union Council and Trotsky's insistence that the Comintern break with it after the failure of the general strike in 1926. Though it is possible that Trotsky's use of the word *neizbeznyye* is a reference to personal weakness, inconsistency is not a theme he pursues in his memoir when characterizing Zinoviev (cowardice and treachery, perhaps, but not inconsistency). In fact, Trotsky has next to nothing to tell us about the substance of the intra-party debates of 1924 and 1925. Zinoviev's sole contribution at that point appears to be as Trotsky's chief antagonist. When Trotsky speaks of Zinoviev in 1926, however, the two are allies. Far more likely than a slam against Zinoviev's inconsistency, then, is the possibility that Trotsky is referring to the difficulty Zinoviev faced, still as chairman of the Comintern, in deciding to call for a break with the British Trade Unions Council, a choice with profound implications for the future of the communist movement in England and the West generally. The choice would have set Zinoviev at clear odds with Stalin and the Central Committee once again and risked disrupting unity in the Comintern at a time when Russia's leaders were hoping for a revival of revolutionary enthusiasm in the West.<sup>17</sup> Thus, some wavering on the question was, in this sense, unavoidable – *neizbeznoe* – rather than typical (*tipichnoe* or *svoistvennoe emu*). Far from sniping at the shallowness of Zinoviev's political convictions, Trotsky could as easily have been referring to the gravity of the question for the Comintern head.

Returning to Carr, we can see that, of the testimonials he provides of Zinoviev's flip-flopping, only Stalin's speaks unambiguously to such a flaw. Given that his charge was leveled amid a concerted campaign against Zinoviev and the Leningrad opposition in December 1925, it would seem important that we use caution before accepting the accusation. Zinoviev insisted that he still supported the resolutions of the fourteenth conference – which al-

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16. *Chetyrnadtsati s'ezd Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (bol'shevikov): Biulleten'; Zasedanie 11-i* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1925), p. 20.

17. In fact, Zinoviev had argued repeatedly in *Leninizm* that the final victory of socialism was not possible without revolution in the more advanced capitalist countries to the West. Clearly he would have been extremely reluctant to break with the most well-organized worker movement in England. G. Zinov'ev, *Leninizm: Vvedenie v izuchenie leninizma* (Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1925).

lowed the leasing of peasant lands, lightened the tax burden on peasants, and freed prices on grain and agricultural products<sup>18</sup> – but Stalin claimed that Zinoviev had first argued that Lenin’s prescriptions for relations with the peasantry could be read like a textbook and needed no amendment; he then, Stalin argued, went on to speak of “neutralizing” the middle peasant (*seredniak*), while Lenin had quite clearly advocated a “firm alliance” with the *seredniak*. Thus, according to the general secretary, Zinoviev was guilty of “underestimating” the middle peasants. Stalin conceded that Zinoviev had reaffirmed the importance of the *seredniak* in his report on the Central Committee to the Leningrad organization, but he did so only after criticism from other TsK members. Until that moment, Zinoviev had allegedly all but ignored the vital role of the *seredniak* and said nothing about Lenin’s call for the development of cooperatives.<sup>19</sup> Though Zinoviev may once have spoken proudly of having a pro-peasant bias (*uklon*), his recent shifts had made him an unreliable authority *vis-à-vis* the peasantry: “as the facts show, Com. Zinoviev has never suffered from that firmness of line in peasant policy that we need (Applause).”<sup>20</sup>

Stalin’s attack was devastating to Zinoviev for two reasons. First, no one could have missed the irony of Zinoviev being accused of neglecting even a part of the peasantry when Zinoviev had himself charged Trotsky with neglecting the peasantry during the controversies of 1923. Second, Stalin had made his case precisely in Zinoviev’s style, lacing his speech with abundant quotes from Lenin and using Zinoviev’s own words against him. Stalin seemed to be defeating Zinoviev at his own game, and he had chosen possibly the most damaging claim to achieve it: inconsistency, which implied shallowness and lack of commitment.

Bukharin further weakened Zinoviev’s positions on state capitalism by pointing out his flaws in interpreting Lenin and reiterating his omission of the *seredniak* in his recent book, *Leninizm*. But inconsistency was not among Bukharin’s criticisms.<sup>21</sup> Of course, considering that Bukharin had been forced more than once to recant his notorious call to peasants to “enrich themselves,” he may not have been in a position to level such a charge. Just as likely, however, is the possibility that Bukharin was engaging Zinoviev on the points with which the latter had attacked him, namely, the nature of the New Economic Policy in the construction of socialism. Zinoviev had not sinned by changing his stance with regard to the peasantry, as Stalin would color it, but in the way he interpreted the *meaning* of the conference and ple-

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18. See Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, 1: 268.

19. *Chetyrnadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b): Biulleten'*; *zasedanie 11-i*, p. 19.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*; *Biulleten'*; *zasedanie 3-e*, pp. 42-70.

num resolutions. For Bukharin, this was the central issue, and he targeted Zinoviev's interpretations first and foremost. Stalin instead understood Zinoviev's position as deviation from an agreed-upon line, opening him to the charge of inconsistency.

Thus Stalin was primarily responsible for characterizing Zinoviev as a political wobbler, and he based his evaluation on Zinoviev's apparent flip-flopping on peasant policy over the course of 1925. Carr generalized from the specific charge, embellishing it with snippets of equally unfavorable but not always relevant portraits from other antagonists. Such a realization does not require that we begin to see Zinoviev as any less than a distasteful individual. It does, however, prompt a more serious consideration of the man as a thinker and political leader than we have to date.

Stalin's characterization had two important consequences. First, it rendered Zinoviev's political judgments flimsy and opportunistic (witness Mezhlauk's caricature). Stalin's response to Zinoviev may or may not have been the most damaging at the fourteenth congress itself – Bukharin's speech and the circus-like atmosphere achieved that equally well – but the implication that Zinoviev's positions were simply hastily considered posturing has had a long life in the historiography. Second, and following from the first, the impression has persisted that the social, political, and economic issues confronting the Bolshevik leadership were of secondary importance to Zinoviev, who was inclined to use them more for personal political gain than out of any genuine conviction. Here again, Carr accepts such a view, arguing that, after the thirteenth party conference of January 1924, "it could be clearly seen that personalities rather than principles were at stake."<sup>22</sup> With the possible exception of Stalin himself, no figure has borne this charge more than Zinoviev.

As a result, traditional historiography of early NEP political struggles pays little attention to the content of Zinoviev's arguments, dismissing him primarily for his political ineptitude and dogmatic reverence for Lenin. Lih has therefore provided a valuable service, beginning a discussion that redirects our attention from the skullduggery of the succession struggle to the fundamental problems vexing the Bolsheviks: how to build socialism and how a socialist society should be governed. Theorizing about the former suited the intellectual predispositions of most leaders (Zinoviev included), but the latter involved immediate concerns that could not be ignored.

Lih attributes the emergence of a "wall" both within the party and between the party and its constituency to the demands of administering the state, the emergencies of war and economic collapse, the monopoly of political power, and the "cultural gap" between leaders and followers. Zinoviev, by Lih's tell-

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22. Edward Hallett Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia: The Interregnum* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 340.

ing, was worried that the *otorvannost'* of party and working masses would turn the party into a "mandarin sect" and sought to increase mass participation in the soviets and the party as well. This argument requires qualification. For if Zinoviev worried about corruption born of the party's monopoly on power, he was also a defender of its "leading role," referring to the system approvingly as a "dictatorship of the party" rather than of the proletariat. He elaborated on this stance at the Twelfth Congress, speaking of the suppression of the Bolsheviks' opponents and of a "single, strong, powerful TsK, which governs everything," including soviets, unions, cooperatives, and the entire working class.<sup>23</sup> Although he agreed that excessive centralization of power in soviet executive committees (*ispolkomy*) needed to be avoided, he repeatedly insisted on the party's prerogative to select *ispolkomy* and to direct the work of the soviets.<sup>24</sup>

To reconcile these positions, it is important to note that Zinoviev accepted the notion of the party both as the country's exclusive political power and as a vehicle for raising the cultural and political level of the working masses.<sup>25</sup> He sought the transformation of the party through the inclusion of larger numbers of workers or poor peasants as well as the transformation of those groups through their involvement with the party: "The party grows from the working class. Here before us is not a one-sided process of the vanguard's influence over the remainder of the class but a two-sided process of mutual influence."<sup>26</sup> As for the soviets, the party must not be allowed to replace them in their work, but they needed "to attract non-party workers, to be able, as Lenin expressed it, 'to build communism with the hands of others,' to train the broad masses to observe strict revolutionary legality."<sup>27</sup> The party was thus to play the role both of ruler and mentor until the classless society had been achieved.

That Zinoviev should protest the growing bureaucratization of the party also requires explanation, for that was one of Trotsky's principal concerns precisely when Zinoviev was leading the triumvirate with Kamenev and Stalin in its attack on him. How do we account for this apparent contradiction? First, Trotsky seems to have encountered relatively little resistance on this score. That the party had become heavy with white-collar employees was the source of widespread displeasure – a sentiment that Zinoviev shared. His had

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23. V. A. Shishkin, *Vlast'/Politika/Ekonomika: Poslerevoliutsionnaia Rossiia (1917-1928 gg.)* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1997), p. 15

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22, 38, 42.

25. Here I agree with N. A. Vasetskii, *G. E. Zinov'ev: Stranitsy politicheskoi biografii, Istoriia i politika KPSS 6* (Moscow: Znanie, 1989), p. 29.

26. Zinov'ev, *Leninizm*, p. 356.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 373-74.

been a voice of alarm after the civil war regarding the de-proletarianization both of the party and of Russia's industrial centers. Given the hostility to the regime expressed in Tambov, Kronstadt, Siberia, and the Far East, not to mention the distaste with which otherwise pro-Bolshevik workers accepted the concessions of NEP, most leaders were well aware of the need to re-establish tight bonds with the working masses. This reason, more than sympathy for the passing of Lenin, necessitated the massive enrollment of workers into the party in 1924.

But rather than concern about links with the masses, Trotsky's complaint was directed at the decline of openness at the top of the organization. He felt himself increasingly cut off from discussions regarding appointments and the setting of agendas; and rather than the open and lively debates that had characterized party decision-making under Lenin, even during the civil war, governance was turning increasingly into a matter of administration, routines based on protocol and direction from above. Gone were the days when personal charisma reigned supreme. The forces of hierarchy, procedure, and party discipline were supplanting it, and atop that administrative hierarchy stood Stalin, whose antipathy to Trotsky was long-standing and well known. Lih suggests that Zinoviev may have shared Trotsky's worries about the decline of broad participation in decision-making. Indeed, that concern lay behind the conspiratorial meeting Zinoviev convened in a cave in Kislovodsk with Bukharin, Voroshilov, Evdokimov, and Lashevich in August 1923, apparently to curtail much of the power that Stalin had accumulated in the *Orgbureau*.<sup>28</sup>

So why should Zinoviev have acted as such a vigorous opponent of Trotsky in 1923 and 1924? Clearly he mistrusted the sincerity of Trotsky's complaint and feared that his leadership would open the door wider to dictatorship than current tendencies were taking the party. But Zinoviev had more to consider regarding his position *vis-à-vis* Trotsky than the question of democracy in the party. Trotsky had repeatedly taken stances on the extreme left that threatened, in Zinoviev's view, the party's relationship to workers and the bulk of the peasantry. Trotsky's call for the militarization of labor had shocked many in the Central Committee and was precisely the recipe to enflame emotions rather than attract worker support. By contrast, Zinoviev had hewn to a moderate line, preferring to draw the support of workers by policies with immediate appeal rather than by coercion. The need for the approval of the working masses, indeed, lay behind his "betrayal" of Lenin in October 1917, fearful as he and Kamenev were that a seizure of power before the Second Congress of Soviets would actually repel workers and set the move-

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28. Carr, *Interregnum*, pp. 290-91; V. A. Kumanev and I. S. Kulikova, *Protivostoianie: Krupskaja-Stalin* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994), p. 93.

ment back indefinitely.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as the person in charge of heavy industry, Trotsky, with help from Piatakov, was instrumental to proposals to shut key factories, including Putilov and the Briansk combine, in a radical concentration move that was highly unpopular.<sup>30</sup> His plans (with Preobrazhensky) for “primitive socialist accumulation” also suggested to Zinoviev a desire to coerce the agricultural sector precisely at the moment when the party most needed its support.

Lih’s assertion that Zinoviev saw the application of pressure to the *kulak* as a move calculated to win the support of poor and middle peasants helps to complete the picture of a man vitally concerned to cement the relationship between the party and populace. Zinoviev wanted to encourage cooperatives among the *bedniaks* and *seredniaks* to win the battle of *kto kogo*. Their victory, he argued, required the cultural leadership of the urban proletariat, which held state power in its hands. In “On Cooperation,” Lenin had argued, “the union of [the] proletariat with the many millions of small and smallest-scale [*melkikh i mel’chaishikh*] peasants, provided with leadership from the proletariat in relation to the peasantry etc. – is that not all that is needed . . . for the complete socialist society?”<sup>31</sup> Rather than paying lip service to NEP while imposing policies that would surely alienate the party’s constituents (as Trotsky seemed to want), Zinoviev wanted to use the NEP to ensure the alliance of workers with lower and middle peasants against bourgeois and *kulak* influences, thus winning support for Bolshevik power among the largest segment of the population.

By mid-1925, however, having defeated Trotsky’s risky social engineering proposals, it seemed to Zinoviev that many of his comrades in the Central Committee were downplaying the importance of class struggle to the party’s most important sources of support. Whether recanted or not, Bukharin’s call for peasant enrichment, combined with Bogushevskii’s claim that the *kulak* was a “bogey,” suggested a willingness to open the door wide to unfettered capitalist development in the countryside – a clear victory for the *kulak*. Zinoviev’s critics accused him either of neglecting or underestimating the *seredniak* as the proletariat’s chief ally in the countryside and counterweight to the *kulak*, but Zinoviev countered that his position did not necessarily mean abandonment of conciliation toward the middle peasants. Talk of “neu-

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29. See Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp. 212-23; also Hedlin, “Zinoviev’s Revolutionary Tactics,” p. 21.

30. See my article, “Legitimacy, Succession, and the Concentration of Industry: Trotsky and the Crises of 1923 Re-examined,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 27, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 397-416.

31. Quoted in Zinoviev, *Leninism*, pp. 327-28.

tralizing" the *seredniak* reflected his conviction that a backward slide in agriculture, such as occurred with the harvest of 1924, would intensify class antagonisms, and *seredniaks* could as easily gravitate toward the *kulaks* as the *bedniaks*. As Carr points out, well-publicized assaults on rural correspondents and rural revolts in Georgia seemed to confirm the impression of sharpening class conflicts among the peasantry, so the party's task was to position itself on the side of the poor peasants in alliance with urban workers.<sup>32</sup> An exclusive orientation toward the middle peasant would turn the latter into *kulaks* and leave the poor peasants still at the mercy of rural exploiters. Moreover, such an approach threatened to rupture the *smychka*, as urban workers would find themselves at the mercy of high prices for agricultural goods. In his response to criticism, Zinoviev argued that workers understood relations with the peasantry "from the point of view of class struggle" and that union with the *seredniak* had to be achieved "not over the head of the *bedniak*" but while maintaining a strong bond with the latter.<sup>33</sup>

Zinoviev's insistence on upholding the alliance between the poor peasantry and workers reflected his experience as the chair of the Leningrad soviet. Over the course of 1925, voices of protest against rising prices and disparities of wealth grew steadily. As I have shown elsewhere, assertions that the party organization of the northern capital simply followed the line of its undisputed party boss do not hold up to scrutiny.<sup>34</sup> If loyalty had been their principal concern, the city's party leaders would certainly have folded before the weight of Central Committee pressure much more rapidly than they did, especially once Zinoviev's isolation became clear. Moreover, given the prevailing characterizations of Zinoviev, it is hard to imagine that he could have engendered such selfless devotion. More likely is the possibility that the Leningrad leaders such as union head Glebov-Avilov, *Leningradskaia pravda* editor Safarov, *guberniia* party secretary Zalutskii, district party leader Sarkis, and propagandist Tarkhanov understood that supporting policies of conciliation – especially ones that encouraged the enrichment of a rural bourgeoisie while denying that it represented a threat – would make them especially unpopular in the most proletarian city in the country.<sup>35</sup>

Zinoviev may indeed have been cynically using the urban bourgeoisie and well-to-do *kulak* for political ends, as his critics charged. Nevertheless, he

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32. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, 1: 196-200.

33. *Chetyrnadsatyi s"ezd RKP(b): Biulleten'*; *zasedanie 10-e*, p. 26.

34. Clayton Black, "Party Crisis and the Factory Shop Floor: Krasnyi Putilovets and the Leningrad Opposition, 1925-26," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 1 (1994): 107-26.

35. The antipathy of Leningrad workers contrasts sharply with the experience of Moscow workers, for whom the NEP marked a genuine improvement in wages. See Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), p. 235.

understood that, if class enemies did not draw the ire of the lower classes for economic problems, the party itself would be their target. Zinoviev was well aware that labor unrest had become a consistent problem in all of the USSR's industrial centers. During the civil war, thousands of workers in Petrograd vented their frustrations in protest meetings and strikes, such as that of July 2, 1918, in which roughly twenty thousand took part.<sup>36</sup> Anti-Bolshevik leaflets and agitational speeches were a regular feature of such demonstrations, and only through force was the new government able to suppress them. Just prior to the introduction of NEP, Petrograd's economic crisis once again pushed the city to the brink of political upheaval. Over the course of February 1921, complaints about wages, working conditions, and food supply quickly evolved into political demands, including calls for the return of the Constituent Assembly.<sup>37</sup> Intensive agitation, together with the brutal crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion and the turn to the NEP, helped restore Bolshevik control. But though political opposition had been forced underground, strikes and work stoppages (*volynki*) – most commonly over delayed wage payments – remained a persistent headache for union and party leaders. The number of large-scale strikes declined in 1923, but though industry seemed to stabilize, the introduction of piece-rate wages in late 1924, combined with frequent late payments, rising prices, frustrations with norm-setting, the apparent weakness of the unions, and resentment at privileges accorded to *spetsy* (often so-called former [*byvshie*] people), meant that hostility toward the state simmered just beneath the surface.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, 1926 saw a sharp increase in strikes and *volynki* with the efforts to cut costs further in the “regime of economy.”

Leningrad party leaders could not have missed the signals of mounting anger from workers over their poor state. Factory, district, city, and *guberniia*-level meetings all featured constant complaints that nepmen and former nobles seemed to be the only people faring well in the new economy. Zinoviev claimed in late 1923 that workers had told him that conditions for the city's workers were worse than almost anywhere in the country.<sup>39</sup> Factory party cells also gave increasing indications of political opposition on the shop floor. The Putilov locomotive-mechanical shop, for example, reported in June 1925, that “there no doubt exists an active group of our opponents [in the shop], who are conducting fairly energetic propaganda among the workers”

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36. M. V. Shkarovskii, “Dokumenty TsGA Sankt-Peterburga o trudovykh konfliktakh v 1918-1928 gg.,” in Iu. I. Kir'ianov *et al.*, *Trudovye konflikty v sovetskoi Rossii 1918-1929 gg.* (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 1998), p. 86.

37. Shkarovskii, “Dokumenty TsGA,” pp. 87-88.

38. I have treated this growing hostility in “Manufacturing Communists: Krasnyi Putilovets and the Politics of Soviet Industrialization, 1923-1932,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana Univ., 1996, pp. 55-95.

39. *Petrogradskaia pravda*, Nov. 27, 1923.

and who complained about the bureaucracy of the soviets and spread rumors about the luxurious privileges of OGPU workers and Zinoviev himself.<sup>40</sup> The factory party committee in September informed *guberniia* secretary Zalutskii of a "growth of elements of dissatisfaction" which presented an "imposing threat" of acquiring a "political character."<sup>41</sup>

From the perspective of Leningrad, then, it is not surprising that Zinoviev should want to keep the party focused on class enemies. Given that the city's workers were feeling betrayed by a state that exploited labor no less than the pre-revolutionary regime and presided over a return to galling class discrepancies, Zinoviev could see that the celebration of bourgeois enrichment that Bukharin's line implied was an invitation to a complete loss of support for the party from its principal constituents.

The concessions to peasants made at the fourteenth conference in April 1925, did not contradict Zinoviev's understanding of correct agricultural policy, at least as long as they did not imply a repudiation of the alliance with the *bedniaks* or struggle against the kulak and nepman. He was not advocating a "squeezing" of the peasantry *à la* Preobrazhenskii but a determined effort to provide credit and material support, along with an invigoration of rural soviets, to *bedniaks* and cooperatives of poor and middle peasants to guarantee their political support. These were precisely the points to which the Central Committee agreed at the October plenum; but a separate point of the plenum resolutions made possible Zinoviev's isolation in the coming months.<sup>42</sup> The CC unanimously agreed that two current "dangers" faced the party: underestimation of the negative sides of NEP, on the one hand, and failure to understand NEP's importance, on the other. In the following months, however, Zinoviev's opponents reworked the formulation to say that, at present, the latter was the greater danger. The Moscow *guberniia* party conference had explicitly renounced the second "deviation," calling for "decisive" struggle against it, and Stalin in his opening speech at the December congress argued that the party "should concentrate its fire on" the deviation that inflated the role of the kulak.<sup>43</sup> Thus, Zinoviev could claim, with some justification, that it was Stalin, not he, who had changed his position with regard to CC resolutions.

The political struggles of 1924 and 1925 between Zinoviev and his former allies in the triumvirate obviously entailed Machiavellian tactics of the high-

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40. Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Istoriko-Politicheskikh Dokumentov Sankt-Peterburga (TsGAIPDSP), fond 1012, opis' 1, delo 134, listy 26-26ob.

41. TsGAIPDSP, f. 1012, op. 1, d. 186, l. 1.

42. *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuz v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s"ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK*, vol. 3, 1922-1925 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1984), pp. 414-15.

43. *Chetyrnadsatyi s"ezd RKP(b): Biulleten'; zasedanie 10-e*, pp. 20-21.

est order. As the fourteenth congress approached, both the Leningrad leadership and its opponents in the Central Committee and Moscow organization moved to broadcast their ideological positions and suppress dissent among subordinates. The historical record, however, thanks to the lasting power of Stalin's characterization of Zinoviev as an inconsistent opportunist and widespread sympathy for Bukharin's "alternative" to Stalinism, continues to be dismissive of Zinoviev's ideological stance as mere political posturing. Hesitation, even fear, at critical moments may have been his most pronounced weakness. Indeed, this seems to have been the crux of Lenin's criticism when he inveighed against the "strikebreakers" of October.<sup>44</sup> But Lih's argument helps us see that such a shortcoming should not be conflated with inconsistency of political conviction. What emerges from this re-examination of Zinoviev – an endeavor that surely requires more extensive study of the available sources – is a portrait of a man deeply anxious about popular support for the Bolshevik regime. That anxiety had led him to protest Lenin's call for a seizure of power in 1917, but it appears that his doubts then were eased neither by victory in October nor in the civil war. Until revolution brought socialism to power in the advanced capitalist countries, the party would have to chart a precarious course that at once rebuilt the economy without betraying the very people in whose name it claimed to rule.

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44. See Vasetskii, *G. E. Zinov'ev*, pp. 9-10.