

## **Grigory Zinoviev joins the Walking Dead**

**FOUR DAYS BEFORE THE GENERAL ELECTION** held on October 29 1924 the *Daily Mail* published the text of a letter from Grigory Zinoviev, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. The letter was addressed to the fledging Communist Party of Great Britain. It ordered the stepping up of the party's seditious activities, and suggested that the opening of diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union by a re-elected Labour Government would help strengthen the revolutionary impulse of the British working class.

During the early twenties lots of trade unionists and Labour activists thought of the tiny Communist Party as an integral and legitimate part of the labour movement; in many areas Labour's rank and file worked hand-in-glove with local communists. So a letter from Moscow addressed to communists in London implicating the Labour Party in sedition against His Majesty's Government did not seem far-fetched.

However, the letter was a forgery, penned by émigré Russians. Yet after its publication by the *Daily Mail*, the Labour Government was voted out by a Tory landslide. Whether the fabrication had a role in the Tory's victory is in some doubt, but the aim of the newspaper's proprietor was clear. As clear as the allegations in the *Daily Mail*, *Telegraph*, and the *Sun*, that Jeremy Corbyn was a spy for the communists in Prague, East Berlin, and Moscow during the eighties.

The interesting thing about this brouhaha is that the suggestion that Jeremy Corbyn, along with Ken Livingstone, had a number of meetings with representatives of Stalinist dictatorships is entirely

true. As true as the fact that Jeremy and Diane went on their hols to the German Democratic Republic (otherwise known as East Germany), and Ken toured the Soviet Union (on at least one occasion paid for by the KGB, the soviet political police). There is nothing imaginary or 'made-up' about any of this. It is indeed true that a number of trade union leaders and Labour MPs were paid informants of the Moscow dictatorship in the years following 1945.

The fanciful element regarding the current Labour leadership has been injected by Paul Dacre, and his fellow editors, as they try to persuade us that Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, and Ken Livingstone were spies for the communists during the nineteen eighties. Evidently these newspapermen remain stranded amidst the walking dead, incapable of Rick Grime's decisiveness in laying waste those pesky corpses. It seems to have escaped their notice, but it is ninety-four years since Zinoviev didn't post his letter, and almost thirty years since the collapse of the communist project, and the dissolution of most of the world's communist parties.

And yet the idea that Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell are crypto communists remains alive and well. Indeed, in response to John Major's speech on the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Corbyn said:

What he and his kind want from the changes is not genuine democracy, not world peace, not decent living standards for all. What they want is a market economy that will keep many in abject poverty.

The fact that Soviet officials and activists starved some four million men, women, and children to death in years 1931-33 by seizing literally all the food and livestock held by peasant households in a number of Ukraine's provinces is, of course, quietly forgotten by Corbyn, along with the fact that "abject poverty" is precisely what Stalin, along with many other communist dictators, delivered to their people

for decade after decade of stagnation and decay well into the nineteen eighties. These regimes collapsed precisely because they lacked the dynamism of well-sprung capitalist development.

The Tory press are wrong to make accusations of spying, but they are right in their suspicion that the current Labour leadership were ‘fellow travellers’, ‘crypto communists’, ‘useful idiots’ – call them what you will – with ‘Iron Curtain’ regimes during the Cold War.

Because of their prior commitment to fighting against imperialism and more or less everything that Nato and the United States stands for, these Labour leaders have always been more at ease with ‘Britain’s enemies’ than with her allies. On top of this they have a built-in preference for state control of economic life, and directly owned state enterprise, over the light regulation of the market advocated by most conservatives.

These views have given rise to sloppy ideas about Stalinists and Stalinism. They have to some extent been sustained by the antique iconography beloved by much of Labour’s radical left, those given to posting socialist realist memes on social media. This is compounded by daft histories in which “the Russians” defeated Hitler all on their own. We are invited to admire the no-frills superiority of Soviet society, which pulled off this startling achievement regardless of the treasure and blood expended by the United States of America, not to mention Britain, her colonies, and self-governing dominions.

This love of ‘Great Patriotic War’ themes is now living a weird afterlife in which Russia’s annexations and interventions in Ukraine and Syria are admired by much of Labour’s far left as a form of *real politik* in which the dictator Assad is figured as the defender of secularism, and the Nato powers are taught a lesson in humility by the political policeman, Vladimir Putin.

Despite these ‘horrid histories’ and the long tradition on Labour’s far left of enthusiasm for dictatorship and

no-nonsense decisiveness, none of their posturing can be described as Stalinism.

This is because there are no Stalinists in the Labour Party. Stalinists were members or fellow travellers of communist parties affiliated to the Third International, and after its dissolution by Stalin in 1943, by those communist parties who shared a prior commitment to the defence of the Soviet Union above all else. Matters were complicated by divisions in the mid fifties between Russia and China, between Stalinists reborn as hardliners, as revisionists, or Eurocommunists and the like, on the one hand, and Maoists of various hues, on the other.

In order to be a Stalinist you had to believe in the possibility of building socialism in one country, secured through the executive power of the party and the state, and consequently you had to be committed to the overwhelming priority of defending the Soviet Union, the birthplace and home of this vision. The sanctity of Moscow's dictatorship in all and every imaginable circumstance was axiomatic for Stalinists everywhere. So since 1991 there have been no Stalinists anywhere, least of all in the British Labour Party. Stalinism exists now only as a bloody memory, or a heroic myth, and for all practical purposes, died along with the Soviet Union after a mere sixty-nine years in the great unravelling initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev.

What survives the death of communism – what refuses to lay down and die – is a belief in the necessity of massive state intervention in the market to protect universal health insurance, to guarantee free education for all, and to build enough houses and flats for people on average incomes.

It is true that John McDonnell or Paul Mason or Momentum's Jon Lansman, might put a fiery – almost Bolshevik – spin on Labour's rather modest proposals, but activist journalists like Amina Gichinga, Joe Todd, Natasha Josette, Aaron Bastani, or Yannis Gourtsoyannis, are committed to remodelling the old social democratic offer as socially inclusive or as

community engagement for our modern age – a different kind of politics – for the many not the few.

If the Tories want to defeat Labour they're going to have to do rather more than bring back Senator Joe McCarthy (the red baiter in chief), from the dead. They might start by addressing the catastrophic failure of the housing market to supply those on average incomes with homes they can afford, they might set out to guarantee free education for all, and spend more money on the health service, and on research and development. A tax hike of 2p in the pound for all tax payers, plus a strategic increase in corporation tax, should sort most of this out without a descent into the inferno, or the rise of a Soviet Britain longed for by some of Labour's unruly youth.

One thing is certain, calling out Corbyn as a traitor and a spy might work with *Daily Mail* readers (average age 58), but it will cut no ice with the rest of the population.