

# Red or right-wing?

By Hillel Ticktin

THE Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) has won 158 seats in the new Russian Duma and with its allies in the Agrarian Party and other parties it can come close to mustering the half plus one of the 450 votes necessary to win resolutions of the Duma. In any case, before the 16 December election it had won majorities in a series of towns and districts over Russia. It might therefore appear as if there is a resurgence of either Stalinism or Marxism in Russia.

In fact there is no resurgence of either. Kagarlitskii's interview in *Workers' Liberty* 27 is naive at best and disastrous at worst. The KPRF does include a series of traditional workers' demands in its programme but these are little more than window dressing given its other statements and the pronouncements of its leader, Zuganov. Given the chauvinist, expansionist, anti-semitic nature of the party, the closest analogue in this country is the National Front.

## The nationalist nature of the KPRF

ZUGANOV, the KPRF leader, has made it clear in a recent interview that the situation of 25 million Russians outside Russia was unacceptable. He said in an interview with *Moskovskii Komsomolets* of 29 November 1995 that "the programme (of the KPRF) unites the ideals of justice and national state development" and that the Russian people are divided with "25 million of our countrymen thrown abroad." The KPRF is clearly expansionist if not worse... Yavlinsky, who conducted the interview, pointed out that the KPRF has two or three factions. Of that there can be no doubt. There is certainly an internationalist faction, with people like Boris Slavin, who writes for *Pravda*, but it is in a minority, probably a small minority. Kagarlitskii must now be counted as an external member sympathetic to this faction. Yavlinsky also declares that Zuganov himself will be sacrificed the day that the KPRF comes to power, seeing him as a relative moderate. Indeed, the KPRF was formed in 1990 as a nationalist faction within the old CPSU and the more militant nationalists may well bay for blood, if they come to power in any way.

Zuganov traces his philosophy and that of his party to conservative monarchist philosophers, KN Leontiev and NY Danilevsky, in Imperial Russia. In that interview there was not one reference to Marx or Lenin.

Alexander Tsipko, a well known Russian right-wing intellectual, has called the KPRF a right-wing party with a red exterior. He is correct, because it supports the market, as Zuganov made clear to foreign businessmen whose investment he courted, and because Zuganov traces his philosophy to Russian nationalist and Tsarist philosophers at the turn of the 19th century. He supports Stolypin, the Tsarist minister who presided over the

white terror after 1905 in Russia, and the imperial Russian generals such as Kutuzov and Suvorov. He constantly quotes the Russian Orthodox Church.

## The KPRF and the working class

SOME might say that he has declared that he supports collectivism. Indeed he has said that it is in the Russian soul. It has been instilled there for a thousand years through the Russian love of the commune. Such collectivism is closer to a mystical authoritarianism than to anything that the genuine left might propose. "With a claimed membership of 600,000 and cells in almost every town and village of Russia, the KPRF includes large numbers of people involved directly in production and anxious to defend workers' rights and interest. The party leadership responds to pressures from these layers with pronouncements reflecting various long-time positions of Russian Marxism," says Renfrey Clarke in a report made before the election itself. These positions are reconciled with the nationalist ideology through the emphasis on the inherent Russian love of the commune. The statements are not left-wing, however. Opposition to privatisation, the imposition of price controls and protection and restoration of the previous forms of the health service and education are completely compatible with the needs of the Russian industrial elite.

Renfrey Clarke, Alexander Tsipko and other commentators who have noted the apparently strange right-wing tendencies of the KPRF do not deal with its fundamental nature. On the other hand, the KPRF appears to claim to be inheriting the mantle of the leaders of Communism, who either paid lip service to Marxism or were Marxists while, on the other hand, its pronouncements, its allies and a large part of its membership are on the far right.

The political *apparatchiki* and assorted other bureaucrats who have lost out in the transition will support a party that promises to restore their former positions. These people are essentially elitist. They are angry at their own failure and the consequent success of other persons and groups. Hence the need for Russian nationalism, in order to stress the role of protection both economic and political for Russia and Russians. Competition within the elite and intelligentsia was very much part of the old system, let alone in the period of the transition from Stalinism.

## Anti-semitism and anti-Westernism

ANTI-SEMITISM is, therefore, critical in that it both attacks Jews who have risen within the semi-market system and the West, which is seen as controlled by Jews. Anti-semitism plays the role of establishing a scapegoat, of attacking and possibly removing real competitors and of nominally opposing the market without directly attacking it. Russian nationalism or chauvinism is then directly championed by the KPRF, with an indirect anti-semitic message, which can be made more explicit on

the doorstep.

Zuganov is too clever to come out with directly anti-semitic statements but he was instrumental in setting up the National Salvation Front with its newspaper, *Den* (Day) and its successor *Zavtra*. It is doubtful whether such a newspaper would be tolerated in this country. It carried an interview between the editors and Le Pen in which they asked him if the problem with the world was not that of the cosmopolitans. He concurred. Whatever Le Pen thought, the word cosmopolitan in Russian means only one thing: Jews.

If there is an internationalist faction, there is an extreme nationalist faction, with Zuganov appearing to be a relative moderate. Yavlinsky may be correct that Zuganov could easily be replaced by a less diplomatic nationalist. The KPRF in power may well be tempted, when under duress, to go for foreign adventures.

## The KPRF in a broader context

WHY is there no genuine Marxist party with any appeal? How is that Anpilov's party, Working Russia, got over 4% of the vote in the elections when Anpilov has often appeared to be more wild than Zuganov? Indeed he may be called a distilled Stalinist Zuganov. His party is supporting Zuganov for President. At the same time this party declared that it wanted genuine socialism.

The answer is that the Russian working class remains atomised and confused and the KPRF and Working Russia appear to be calling for a return to the better days of the past without its worst aspects. The elite has taken the opportunity once again to bamboozle the working class by projecting forward a party which claims to support workers' interests. Even if the Russian parliamentary system does not have the tweedledum and tweedledee of the British one, it has evolved a parallel form. On the one side there are those who stand for the free market of the West while on the other there are those who claim to be against it, in the name of Russian nationalism. In Russia they tend to confuse things even further by talking of Westernisers and Slavophiles. It is, however, no accident that the KPRF has had a good press in the West. It is not difficult for right-wing journalists to see the essentially right-wing nature of Zuganov. They may not like his nationalism but they recognise that he will keep the lid on the working class for a few more years if he should ever come to power.

Both sides, however, are part of the elite and both sides support the market. Neither side supports the working class. In this respect, Kagarlitskii's position in *Workers' Liberty* is reprehensible. Even if there are a number of people in the KPRF who are on the left, as he asserts, they can only be there because they are utterly confused. He argues that people see it as the party of Lenin but there are many other Communist Parties in Russia which they could have joined if they were looking for the party of Lenin. His party, the Party of Labour, has died, to all intents and purposes, and it may be that he finds it useful to ally himself with elements in the KPRF. No intelligent person can look at Zuganov's statements and say that he has even the slightest trace of Lenin in him. Hitler is a much closer comparison. ■