

Gregory Zinoviev was born in Yelizavetgrad, Ukraine, Russia on 23rd September, 1883. The son of a Jewish diary farmers, Zinoviev received no formal schooling and was educated at home. At the age of fourteen he found work as a clerk.

Zinoviev joined the Social Democratic Party in 1901. He became involved in trade union activities and as a result of police persecution he left Russia and went to live in Berlin before moving on to Paris. In 1903 Zinoviev met Vladimir Lenin and George Plekhanov in Switzerland.

At the Second Congress of the Social Democratic Party in London in 1903, there was a dispute between Vladimir Lenin and Jules Martov, two of the party's main leaders. Lenin argued for a small party of professional revolutionaries with a large fringe of non-party sympathisers and supporters. Martov disagreed believing it was better to have a large party of activists. Martov won the vote 28-23 but Lenin was unwilling to accept the result and formed a faction known as the Bolsheviks. Those who remained loyal to Martov became known as Mensheviks.

Leon Trotsky, who got to know him during this period compared him to Lev Kamenev: "Zinoviev and Kamenev are two profoundly different types. Zinoviev is an agitator. Kamenev a propagandist. Zinoviev was guided in the main by a subtle political instinct. Kamenev was given to reasoning and analyzing. Zinoviev was always inclined to fly off at a tangent. Kamenev, on the contrary, erred on the side of excessive caution. Zinoviev was entirely absorbed by politics, cultivating no other interests and appetites. In Kamenev there sat a sybarite and a aesthete. Zinoviev was vindictive. Kamenev was good nature personified."

Zinoviev joined the Bolsheviks. So also did Lev Kamenev, Anatoli Lunacharsky, Joseph Stalin, Mikhail Lashevich, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Alexei Rykov, Yakov Sverdlov, Mikhail Frunze, Maxim Litvinov, Vladimir Antonov, Felix Dzerzhinsky, Gregory Ordzhonikidze, and Alexander Bogdanov. Whereas George Plekhanov, Pavel Axelrod, Leon Trotsky, Lev Deich, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, Irakli Tsereteli, Moisei Uritsky, Noi Zhordania and Fedor Dan supported Jules Martov.

In the autumn of 1903 Zinoviev returned to Russia where he became involved in the publication of *Iskra*. The following year he moved to Switzerland where he studied chemistry at Berne University. He also continued to contribute to Bolshevik journals such as *Vperyod*.



Gregory Zinoviev in prison as a young man

With the outbreak of the 1905 Revolution Zinoviev returned to Russia and helped organize the general strike in St. Petersburg. Taken seriously ill with heart trouble, Zinoviev was forced to abandon the struggle and receive treatment abroad. Zinoviev returned to Russia in March, 1906, and over the next three years agitated amongst metalworkers in St. Petersburg. As one of the key leaders of the Bolsheviks, Zinoviev was involved in the struggle with the Mensheviks for control over the workers and the armed forces in the city.

In 1907 Zinoviev attended the London Party Congress and was elected to the six man Bolshevik Central Committee. The following year Zinoviev was arrested by the Okhrana but was later released without charge. Afraid of being re-arrested, Zinoviev moved to Geneva where he worked with Vladimir Lenin and Lev Kamenev in the publication of *Proletary*. Although living in exile, he helped to organize the publication of *Zvezda* and *Pravda* in St. Petersburg.

In 1912 Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and Vladimir Lenin moved to Krakow in Galicia to be closer to Russia. On the outbreak of the First World War they were forced to move to the neutral Switzerland.

After the overthrow of Nicholas II in 1917, Zinoviev, Vladimir Lenin and Lev Kamenev returned to Russia and joined with Leon Trotsky and others in plotting against the government being led by Alexander Kerensky. Soon after arriving in St. Petersburg, Lenin and Zinoviev published their views on how to achieve a Marxist revolution. Zinoviev also became the new editor of *Pravda*.

The Bolshevik Party feared that Zinoviev and Vladimir Lenin would be arrested and so on the 9th July, 1917, they went into hiding. Zinoviev returned in August and worked for *Proletary* and *Rabachii Put*. At a meeting of the Central Committee on 9th October, Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev were the only members opposed to Lenin's call for revolution. He later changed his mind and took part in the October Revolution that brought the Bolsheviks to power.

In February, 1917, Zinoviev was elected Chairman of the Council of Commissars of the Petrograd Workers' Commune. The following month he became Chairman of the Council of Commissars of the Union of Communes of the Northern Region. At the First World Congress of the Comintern in March, 1919, he was elected chairman of the Executive Committee.

Zinoviev reached the peak of his power in 1923 when with Joseph Stalin and Lev Kamenev became one of the Triumvirate that planned to take over from Vladimir Lenin when he died. Victor Serge commented: "Zinoviev, a collaborator of Lenin's since 1907, theoretician, popularizer and orator, is

defending, at Petrograd, one of the most advanced and most threatened outposts of the Republic. As President of the Executive Committee of the Northern Commune, he is the dictator of a great workers's city, starving, cholera-stricken and vulnerable to surprise attack. Zinoviev, with his tousled head, smooth, rather flabby face, nonchalant stance, rounded gestures, deep, sometimes strident and always audible voice, Zinoviev, with his merciless choice of words often confronts and subdues, in the old capital's factories, the discontent and anger of a proletariat whose best sons are at the front, and which is dying of hunger.”

After the death of Lenin 1924, Zinoviev joined forces with Lev Kamenev and Joseph Stalin to keep Leon Trotsky from power. In 1925 Stalin was able to arrange for Trotsky to be dismissed as commissar of war and the following year the Politburo. With the decline of Trotsky, Stalin felt strong enough to stop sharing power with Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev. Stalin now began to attack Trotsky's belief in the need for world revolution. He argued that the party's main priority should be to defend the communist system that had been developed in the Soviet Union. This put Zinoviev and Kamenev in an awkward position. They had for a long time been strong supporters of Trotsky's theory that if revolution did not spread to other countries, the communist system in the Soviet Union was likely to be overthrown by hostile, capitalist nations. However, they were reluctant to speak out in favour of a man whom they had been in conflict with for so long.

Louis Fischer, an American journalist who supported Stalin, reported in the *Current History Magazine* in June, 1925: "One is at a loss sometimes to explain the ascendancy of a man like Gregory Zinoviev.... His mental powers are mediocre, his personality far from being winning, even to his own party colleagues is often repulsive. With his high, monotonous falsetto voice he could not be an orator even if his speeches excelled in style, incision and depth, and this is not generally the case."



Gregory Zinoviev

When Joseph Stalin was finally convinced that Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev were unwilling to join forces with Leon Trotsky against him, he began to support openly the economic policies of right-wing members of the Politburo like Nikolay Bukharin, Mikhail Tomsky and Alexei Rykov. They now realized what Stalin was up to but it took them to summer of 1926 before they could swallow their pride and join with Trotsky against Stalin.

When Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev eventually began attacking his policies, Joseph Stalin argued they were creating disunity in the party and managed to have them expelled from the Central Committee. The belief that the party would split into two opposing factions was a strong fear amongst active communists in the Soviet Union. They were convinced that if this happened, western countries would take advantage of the situation and invade the Soviet Union.

Under pressure from the Central Committee, Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev agreed to sign statements promising not to create conflict in the movement by making speeches attacking official policies. Leon Trotsky refused to sign and was banished to the remote area of Kazhakstan.

At the 17th Party Congress in 1934, when Sergey Kirov stepped up to the podium he was greeted by spontaneous applause that equalled that which was required to be given to Stalin. In his speech he put forward a policy of reconciliation. He argued that people should be released from prison who had opposed the government's policy on collective farms and industrialization. The members of the Congress gave Kirov a vote of confidence by electing him to the influential Central Committee Secretariat. Stalin grew jealous of Kirov's popularity. As Edward P. Gazur has pointed out: "In sharp contrast to Stalin, Kirov was a much younger man and an eloquent speaker, who was able to sway his listeners; above all, he possessed a charismatic personality. Unlike Stalin who was a Georgian, Kirov was also an ethnic Russian, which stood in his favour."

Kirov put forward a policy of reconciliation. He argued that people should be released from prison who had opposed the government's policy on collective farms and industrialization. Once again, Stalin found himself in a minority in the Politburo. After years of arranging for the removal of his opponents from the party, Stalin realized he still could not rely on the total support of the people whom he had replaced them with. Stalin no doubt began to wonder if Kirov was willing to wait for his mentor to die before becoming leader of the party. Stalin was particularly concerned by Kirov's willingness to argue with him in public, fearing that this would undermine his authority in the party.

As usual, that summer Kirov and Stalin went on holiday together. Stalin, who treated Kirov like a son, used this opportunity to try to persuade him to remain loyal to his leadership. Stalin asked him to leave Leningrad to join him in Moscow. Stalin wanted Kirov in a place where he could keep a close eye on him. When Kirov refused, Stalin knew he had lost control over his protégé. As usual, that summer Kirov and Stalin went on holiday together. Stalin, who treated Kirov like a son, used this opportunity to try to persuade him to remain loyal to his leadership. Stalin asked him to leave Leningrad to join him in Moscow. Stalin wanted Kirov in a place where he could keep

a close eye on him. When Kirov refused, Stalin knew he had lost control over his protégé. According to Alexander Orlov, who had been told this by Genrikh Yagoda, Stalin decided that Kirov had to die.

Yagoda assigned the task to Vania Zaporozhets, one of his trusted lieutenants in the NKVD. He selected a young man, Leonid Nikolayev, as a possible candidate. Nikolayev had recently been expelled from the Communist Party and had vowed his revenge by claiming that he intended to assassinate a leading government figure. Zaporozhets met Nikolayev and when he discovered he was of low intelligence and appeared to be a person who could be easily manipulated, he decided that he was the ideal candidate as assassin.

Zaporozhets provided him with a pistol and gave him instructions to kill Kirov in the Smolny Institute in Leningrad. However, soon after entering the building he was arrested. Zaporozhets had to use his influence to get him released. On 1st December, 1934, Nikolayev, got past the guards and was able to shoot Kirov dead. Nikolayev was immediately arrested and after being tortured by Genrikh Yagoda he signed a statement saying that Gregory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev had been the leaders of the conspiracy to assassinate Kirov.

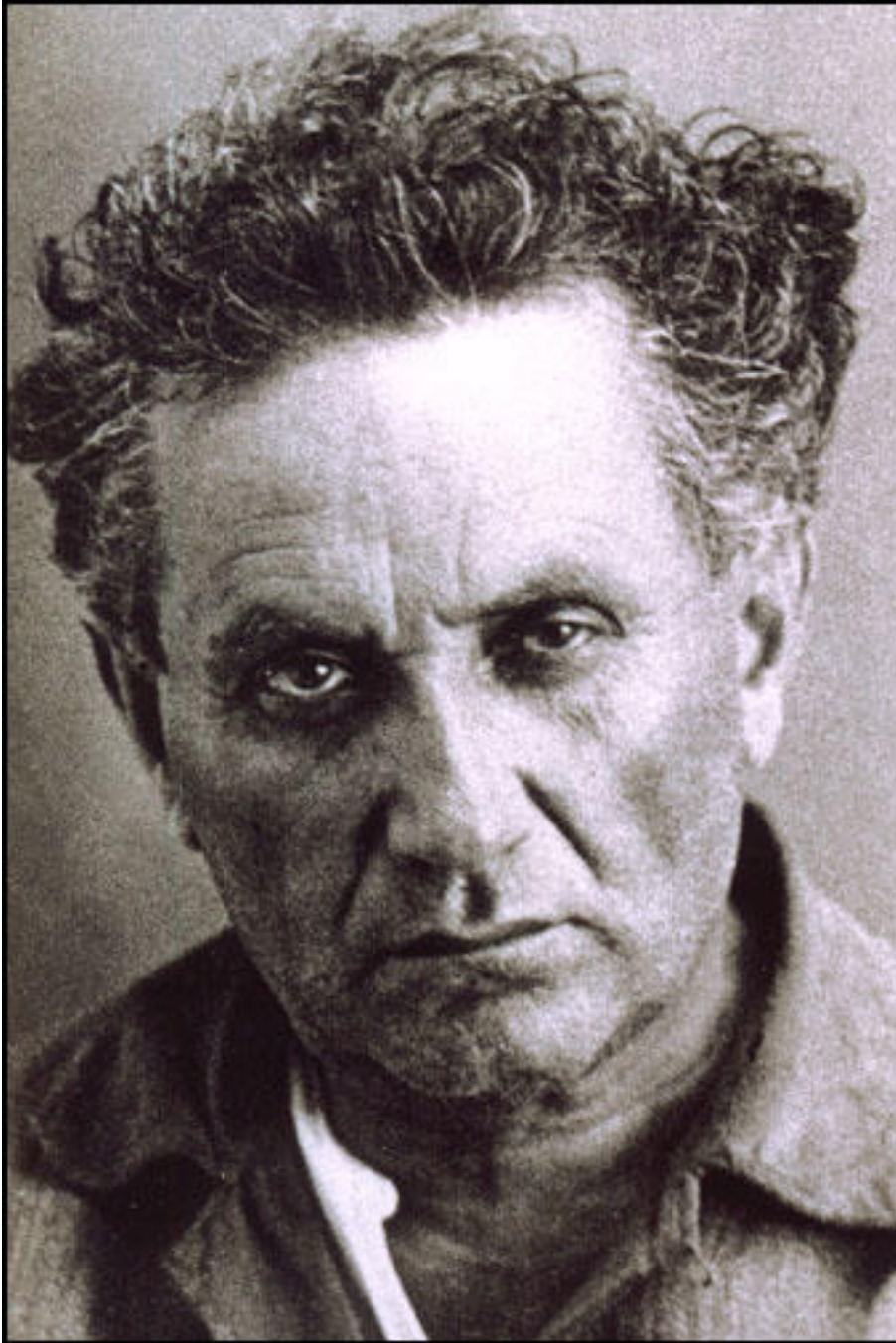
According to Alexander Orlov: "Stalin decided to arrange for the assassination of Kirov and to lay the crime at the door of the former leaders of the opposition and thus with one blow do away with Lenin's former comrades. Stalin came to the conclusion that, if he could prove that Zinoviev and Kamenev and other leaders of the opposition had shed the blood of Kirov". Victor Kravchenko has pointed out: "Hundreds of suspects in Leningrad were rounded up and shot summarily, without trial. Hundreds of others, dragged from prison cells where they had been confined for years, were executed in a gesture of official vengeance against the Party's enemies. The first accounts of Kirov's death said that the assassin had acted as a tool of dastardly foreigners - Estonian, Polish, German and finally British. Then came a series of official reports vaguely linking Nikolayev with present and past followers of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and other dissident old Bolsheviks."

Leonid Nikolayev was executed after his trial but Zinoviev and Kamenev refused to confess. Ya S. Agranov, the deputy commissar of the secret police, reported to Stalin he was not able to prove that they had been directly involved in the assassination. Therefore in January 1935 they were tried and convicted only for "moral complicity" in the crime. "That is, their opposition had created a climate in which others were incited to violence." Zinoviev was sentenced to ten years hard labour, Kamenev to five.

Genrikh Yagoda now had the task of persuading Kamenev and Zinoviev to confess to their role in the death of Kirov as part of the plot to assassinate Stalin and other leaders of government. When they refused to do this Stalin had a new provision enacted into law on 8th April 1935 which would enable him to exert additional leverage over his enemies. The new law decreed that children of the age of twelve and over who were found guilty of crimes would be subjected to the same punishment as adults, up to and including the death penalty. This provision provided NKVD with the means by which they could coerce a confession from a political dissident simply by claiming that false charges would be brought against their children.

Edward P. Gazur, the author of *Alexander Orlov: The FBI's KGB General* (2001), claims that Alexander Orlov later admitted: "In the months preceding the trial, the two men were subjected to every conceivable form of interrogation: subtle pressure, then periods of enormous pressure, starvation, open and veiled threats, promises, as well as physical and mental torture. Neither man would succumb to the ordeal they faced." Stalin was frustrated by Stalin's lack of success and brought in Nikolai Yezhov to carry out the interrogations.

Orlov, who was a leading figure in the NKVD, later admitted what happened. "Towards the end of their ordeal, Zinoviev became sick and exhausted. Yezhov took advantage of the situation in a desperate attempt to get a confession. Yezhov warned that Zinoviev must affirm at a public trial that he had plotted the assassination of Stalin and other members of the Politburo. Zinoviev declined the demand. Yezhov then relayed Stalin's offer; that if he co-operated at an open trial, his life would be spared; if he did not, he would be tried in a closed military court and executed, along with all of the opposition. Zinoviev vehemently rejected Stalin's offer. Yezhov then tried the same tactics on Kamenev and again was rebuffed."



The last known photograph of Gregory Zinoviev

In July 1936 Yezhov told Gregory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev that their children would be charged with being part of the conspiracy and would face execution if found guilty. The two men now agreed to co-operate at the trial if Joseph Stalin promised to spare their lives. At a meeting with Stalin, Kamenev told him that they would agree to co-operate on the condition that none of the old-line Bolsheviki who were considered the opposition and charged at the new trial would be executed, that their families would not be

persecuted, and that in the future none of the former members of the opposition would be subjected to the death penalty. Stalin replied: "That goes without saying!"

The trial opened on 19th August 1936. Five of the sixteen defendants were actually NKVD plants, whose confessional testimony was expected to solidify the state's case by exposing Zinoviev, Kamenev and the other defendants as their fellow conspirators. The presiding judge was Vasily Ulrikh, a member of the secret police. The prosecutor was Andrei Vyshinsky, who was to become well-known during the Show Trials over the next few years.

Yuri Piatakov accepted the post of chief witness "with all my heart." Max Shachtman pointed out: "The official indictment charges a widespread assassination conspiracy, carried on these five years or more, directed against the head of the Communist party and the government, organized with the direct connivance of the Hitler regime, and aimed at the establishment of a Fascist dictatorship in Russia. And who are included in these stupefying charges, either as direct participants or, what would be no less reprehensible, as persons with knowledge of the conspiracy who failed to disclose it?"

The men made confessions of their guilt. Lev Kamenev said: "I Kamenev, together with Zinoviev and Trotsky, organised and guided this conspiracy. My motives? I had become convinced that the party's - Stalin's policy - was successful and victorious. We, the opposition, had banked on a split in the party; but this hope proved groundless. We could no longer count on any serious domestic difficulties to allow us to overthrow. Stalin's leadership we were actuated by boundless hatred and by lust of power."

Gregory Zinoviev also confessed: "I would like to repeat that I am fully and utterly guilty. I am guilty of having been the organizer, second only to Trotsky, of that block whose chosen task was the killing of Stalin. I was the principal organizer of Kirov's assassination. The party saw where we were going, and warned us; Stalin warned as scores of times; but we did not heed these warnings. We entered into an alliance with Trotsky."

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Kamenev's final words in the trial concerned the plight of his children: "I should like to say a few words to my children. I have two children, one is an army pilot, the other a Young Pioneer. Whatever my sentence may be, I consider it just... Together with the people, follow where Stalin leads." This was a reference to the promise that Stalin made about his sons.

On 24th August, 1936, Vasily Ulrikh entered the courtroom and began reading the long and dull summation leading up to the verdict. Ulrikh announced that all sixteen defendants were sentenced to death by shooting. Edward P. Gazur has pointed out: "Those in attendance fully expected the customary addendum which was used in political trials that stipulated that the sentence was commuted by reason of a defendant's contribution to the Revolution. These words never came, and it was apparent that the death sentence was final when Ulrikh placed the summation on his desk and left the court-room." The following day Soviet newspapers carried the announcement that all sixteen defendants had been put to death.

PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

(1) The Granat Encyclopaedia of the Russian Revolution was published by the Soviet government in 1924. The encyclopaedia included a collection of autobiographies and biographies of over two hundred people involved in the Russian Revolution.

Zinoviev played a vigorous role in the Party electoral campaign for the third Duma, whilst at the same time being fully involved in the clandestine life of the Party. In spring 1908 he was arrested during an editorial meeting on the Vasilievsky Ostrov. The Okhrana, however, was not fully apprised of his activity. He fell seriously ill in custody and thanks to the intervention of the late D. V. Stasov, he was soon snatched from prison's grasp, being released under police supervision within a few months.

(2) Louis Fischer, *Current History Magazine* (June, 1925)

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(3) Victor Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution* (1930)

Zinoviev, a collaborator of Lenin's since 1907, theoretician, popularizer and orator, is defending, at Petrograd, one of the most advanced and most threatened outposts of the Republic. As President of the Executive Committee of the Northern Commune, he is the dictator of a great workers' city, starving, cholera-stricken and vulnerable to surprise attack. Zinoviev, with his tousled head, smooth, rather flabby face, nonchalant stance, rounded gestures, deep, sometimes strident and always audible voice, Zinoviev, with his merciless choice of words often confronts and subdues, in the old capital's factories, the discontent and anger of a proletariat whose best sons are at the front, and which is dying of hunger.

(4) Gregory Zinoviev, speech at the Eleventh Party Congress (1922)

I am speaking concerning the fact that we constitute the single legal party in Russia: that we maintain a so-called monopoly on legality. We have taken away political freedom from our opponents; we do not permit the legal existence of those who strive to compete with us. We have clamped a lock on the lips of the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. We could not have acted otherwise. The dictatorship of the proletariat, Comrade Lenin says, is a very terrible undertaking. It is not possible to ensure the victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat without breaking the backbone of all opponents of the dictatorship. No one can appoint the time when we shall be able to revise our attitude to this question.