

International tributes for Russian Marxist historian Vadim Rogovin buried in Moscow

Our Correspondent
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More than three dozen people gathered at the Moscow Crematorium September 21 to mourn the passing of Vadim Zakharovich Rogovin, Russian Marxist historian and sociologist and author of a six-volume study of the Trotskyist opposition to the rise of the Stalinist regime within the Soviet Union. Rogovin died of cancer on September 18. He was 61 years old.

Among the mourners were his wife Galina Ivanovna and his elderly mother, as well as his two daughters from his first marriage, who flew from Israel to attend the funeral.

The presence of many friends and comrades from the United States, France and Germany was testimony to the high esteem and recognition which Rogovin enjoyed in many countries.

As a Doctor of Philosophy and a researcher at the Sociological Institute of the Academy of Science in Moscow, Vadim Zakharovich Rogovin had been one of the most highly regarded social scientists in the Soviet Union. However, only a few of his former academic colleagues were there to see him find his final resting place.

In contrast to many others, Rogovin remained true to his Marxist and socialist convictions during the years of perestroika and following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite the difficulties that the advance of his cancer caused, he continued to dedicate all his energies to historical study, completing six volumes of a projected seven-volume history of the Marxist opposition to Stalinism in the USSR from 1923 to 1940. He was able to speak with many of those still alive who had lived through this period and had personal knowledge of the opposition.

Several sons and daughters of those who took part in the socialist opposition to Stalinism participated in the funeral and paid moving tributes to Rogovin's work. Amongst those who spoke was Valeri Borisovich Bronstein, a great nephew of Leon Trotsky. Another speaker was Yuri Vitalievich Primakov, the son of General Vitali Primakov, who had joined the Bolshevik party in 1914 and played an outstanding role in the Civil War. Vitali Primakov was arrested on false charges in 1937, tried and executed.

Also present was Yuri Vladimirovich Smirnov, the son of Vladimir Smirnov, who became a Bolshevik in the difficult years following the defeat of the 1905 Revolution. As an economic expert, he served on the Presidium of the Supreme Economic Soviet. He was expelled from the party in 1927, banished to Vorkuta, and died there in 1937.

During the last years of his life, Rogovin worked closely with the International Committee of the Fourth International. At many well-attended lectures in Australia, the US, Britain and Germany he spoke of the results of his research. On behalf of the ICFI, Ulrich Rippert, the chairman of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) of Germany, paid tribute to the life and work of Vadim Rogovin. He said that the struggle for historical truth, to which Rogovin had dedicated his life, would be continued and live on in the ranks of the Fourth International.

The Director of the Sociological Institute of the Academy of Social Sciences, Vladimir Yadov, spoke highly of Vadim Rogovin, both the

scientist and the human being. He said Rogovin had never adapted himself to Stalinism, not even under the most difficult conditions, and had thus achieved great international recognition and regard.

At a memorial meeting held after the funeral, letters and telegrams of condolence were read out. These included one from Professor Nathan Steinberger of Berlin, himself a victim of Stalinist repression, who endured 25 years in Kolyma in eastern Siberia. Following the collapse of East Germany, Steinberger met Rogovin at several scientific conventions and came to regard him highly.

He wrote that the death of Rogovin left a void in the ranks of the revolutionary movement of Russia and the world that will be difficult to fill. "We know, however, that the works which Vadim Rogovin leaves behind, especially his writings on Stalinism, will remain and will certainly gain increasing recognition. His deep-going scientific investigation has torn away the lie that the Stalinist system of bureaucratic rule was the logical continuation of the socialist October Revolution." Steinberger wrote that the coming revival of the socialist movement will rest heavily on the work of Rogovin. "I extend my hand to you, dear Mrs. Galia Ivanovna, and wish all those who are close to Vadim Zakharovich Rogovin success in their continued work."

Nick Beams, the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of Australia, sent a telegram which said that he and all the members of the SEP valued having known Vadim Rogovin and having been able to make the results of his researches accessible to a wider international audience. "Vadim is gone. We mourn his loss. But we draw strength from the fact that his ideas will live on in the new generation who will be educated and enlightened by his work, and who will carry forward the struggle for socialism and the striving for genuine social equality which inspired him."

Ulrich Rippert said a close friendship and mutually stimulating intellectual exchange had bound Vadim Rogovin with David North, the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in the US. In a letter to Vadim's widow, Galina Ivanovna, North wrote, "My friendship with Vadim began with our first meeting in Kiev in February 1993. I treasure the memories of all our subsequent meetings—in Moscow, the United States, Europe and Australia. I recall with deep emotion the many different facets of our collaboration.

"Since June 1994 all our work unfolded under the darkening shadow of Vadim's terrible illness. And yet, these last years were the most productive, important and happiest of his life.

"For this fact you, my dear Galia, are chiefly responsible. None of Vadim's achievements would have been possible without your inexhaustible support and love. It was to you that he owed the environment that made his creative work possible."

*** * * Tributes from Valeri Bronstein, Yuri Primakov, Yuri Smirnov, Tatiana Smilga and Zoya Serebriakova
Valeri Borisovich Bronstein (born 1924)**

Valeri Bronstein is the son of a nephew of Leon Trotsky who was politically active and was executed in 1937. His father was rehabilitated

under the Khrushchev regime and posthumously reinstated as a party member.

We never had any good books about the struggle of the opposition to Stalin. After the destruction of the opposition in the 1930s, there were only isolated individuals left who knew anything about the activities of the oppositionists. Then the war and the struggle against fascism overshadowed these memoirs. Nobody remembered Trotsky anymore, there was only one: Stalin.

Although discussions were permitted at the time of Khrushchev's "thaw," the 1950s generation only heard about Trotsky and the Left Opposition as enemies of socialism. My father was rehabilitated at that time and I became a party member, despite having spent many years in banishment in Kolyma. My mother was also in the camp there for 17 years, as the wife of an "enemy of the people."

The "thaw" was quickly over, and in the years of "stagnation" under Breznev, Stalin was increasingly rehabilitated and built up as an authority. Breznev, Andropov and Chernenko once again acted against "enemies of the party." Only under perestroika was Trotsky mentioned and it became possible to read his books again. Only today are people finding out about the millions who were murdered or imprisoned in the camps.

The "new democracy," however, has renounced socialism in general and Trotsky in particular. I have even heard of cases where members of Ziuganov's party [the Communist Party] have expelled people simply because they had read Trotsky's books. These "democrats" portray Trotsky as a monster and equate him with Stalin.

However, there was a small group of scientists who were familiar with Trotsky's writings and published his books again. One of the foremost of these was Vadim Rogovin. His own books, which were far superior to all others, were dedicated to answering the question, "Was there an alternative to Stalinism?" In his work, he studied the history of the revolutionary struggle inside the party and this is an outstanding accomplishment. Easy to read and understand, his books are an extremely valuable contribution to the objective understanding of history. At last the history of the inner-party struggle is becoming known.

Rogovin's work is an important contribution to the struggle against Stalinism, which continues to be falsely equated with socialism. It will play a great role in the development of a new Marxist movement in Russia. Increasingly, scientists who discuss this question will have to acknowledge his arguments.

Yuri Vitalievich Primakov (born 1927)

Yuri Primakov is the son of General Vitali Markovich Primakov (1897-1937), who joined the Bolshevik party three years before the October Revolution and was banished to Siberia under the tsarist regime. In 1934 he was arrested by Stalin and three years later sentenced to death and executed.

During the entire Soviet period, alternatives to Stalinism were persecuted as treason and Marxism was distorted beyond recognition. Although the dictatorship was relaxed somewhat after Stalin, the fundamental mistakes continued. The broad mass of the population continued to be excluded from social and economic decision-making. Nothing was learned from the experiences of the 1920s and 30s.

Rogovin was the first one in the Soviet Union to write objectively about the Stalin period, without hiding the facts or falsifying them, and without slandering anybody. He opened up the way to the hidden side of our history. The most important thing today is the clash of opinions, so that problems can be solved. This means finally breaking with conformism.

Our history demonstrates that no problems can be solved from above. Rogovin's books enable ordinary people today to gain an understanding of history, quite the opposite from the official *Short History of the USSR*.

Vadim was a person who had no fear. During a very difficult time, he wrote about something which nobody else wanted to. The archives which have now been opened actually make it much easier to conduct such work,

but no one else wanted to do it. Although illness condemned him to death, Vadim rallied all his strength to break through the veil of silence. Now his work must be continued, as the problems facing every country are still unresolved.

Yuri Vladimirovich Smirnov (born 1917)

Yuri Smirnov is the son of Vladimir Mikhailovich Smirnov (1887-1937), who joined the Bolsheviks in 1907. After the October Revolution he was a People's Commissar in Finland and subsequently a member of the Moscow Revolutionary Committee. In 1921 he became a staff member of the state planning body, Gosplan. He joined the United Opposition in 1926 and was expelled from the party at its Fifteenth Congress. He died in 1937 following many years banishment.

Unfortunately, I only got to know Vadim Zakharovich at the beginning of this year. However, he made a big impression on me as a person. It was always very interesting to talk with him and he was very observant. One of his special qualities was his ability to work. He was able to bring out a whole series of books in the few years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. They all contain a great amount of interesting material and many hitherto unknown facts. His books are so engaging because they are written objectively, without censorship, without distortion or diatribe.

As a child, I knew many revolutionaries and members of the Left Opposition. I even attended Lenin's funeral. Vadim's books awakened long-forgotten childhood memories. These people were very straightforward and I enjoyed good relations with them. I was always able to go to them because they loved children. For example, I well remember Radek, Ordzhonikidze and Dzerzhinsky (regardless of what they later became). These memories correspond to what Vadim has written. That is very interesting.

Tatiana Ivarovna Smilga (born 1919)

Tatiana Smilga is the daughter of Ivar Tennisovich Smilga (1892-1938). He was elected a Central Committee member of the Bolshevik Party in April 1917 and also belonged to the Revolutionary War Council. He was later a leader of the Left Opposition. Rogovin quotes the occasion when, facing his Stalinist interrogators, Smilga said, "I am your enemy." He was condemned as a terrorist during the first Moscow Trial and was most likely executed in 1938.

Vadim's books are very extensive, of a high intellectual standard and written in a wonderful language. They read like a novel. I knew many of the people about whom Vadim writes. However, up to now there had never been such an extensive and informative work about political life in revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union of the 1920s. Nobody had written such things about the internal life of the inner-party struggle.

For decades, much more was known abroad about these events than here in Russia. The best generations were wiped out and it has not yet been possible to heal these deep wounds. Vadim's books are of great significance for the future of Russia and the whole world because they do not hide the truth. He should have received the Nobel Prize for that.

It is unfortunate that I only came to know Vadim over the last year. I knew him as a very intelligent man, who was very observant, very natural and pleasant.

Zoya Serebriakova (born 1923)

Sorya Serebroyakova is the daughter of Leonid Petrovich Serebriakov (1890-1937). As a metalworker, he joined the Bolsheviks in 1905 and was one of the leaders of the 1917 Revolution in Moscow. During the Civil War he led the political administration of the Red Army for a time. He was in the leadership of the Left Opposition beginning in 1923. One of the chief accused in the Piatakov-Radek trial, he was condemned to death and executed.

Vadim has completed a heroic task with his books. Despite his serious illness he did everything to restore the historical truth. The fourth and fifth volumes are especially impressive. Following Trotsky, this is the first modern work to throw light onto the crimes of Stalinism. Today, that is

especially important because Stalinism is being revived and we live in very dangerous times.

Vadim's books are thus not only important from an historical, but also from a political point of view. I thank Vadim Zakhorovich as a person and as a historian. I would like to thank him in the name of all those who lost their lives in the struggle against Stalinism. I am thinking especially of Trotsky himself and his friends. It is very good that someone has finally written about this.

***** Remarks of Vladimir Volkov and Ulrich Rippert**

Vladimir Volkov, a leading member of the ICFI in Cheliabinsk, Russia, and Ulrich Rippert, chairman of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit of Germany, spoke as representatives of the Fourth International.

Vladimir Volkov

I would like to say a few words about Vadim Rogovin as a person and a historian. He belonged to a generation which is linked to one of the best sides of Soviet history, the generation of the "sixties." It came to life at precisely the same moment that the Soviet economy and hopes for a better future experienced a major revival. The destiny of this generation took an extremely dramatic course. Over the past 30 years the majority of its representatives have turned away more and more from the principles and ideals of their youth. But to this day, the generation of the sixties has determined Russia's intellectual and cultural life, its best as well as—unfortunately, to an increasingly great extent—its worst sides.

In contrast to others, Vadim Zakhorovich did not only retain the ideals of his youth, but he was able to develop them and place them on a historical and ideological basis. He was able to exhaust all the new possibilities that had opened up for former Soviet citizens: a freer access to information, books, many archives and historical documents which had been forbidden in the past, and the ability to travel abroad. He was able to gather his observations and research concerning different subjects and express them in a historical work of several volumes. Unfortunately he was not able to complete it.

I think that Vadim Rogovin has joined the ranks of the greatest historians not only of modern Russia, but of the world as a whole. In addition, he can be compared to such great Russian historians of the past century as N. Karamzin and V. Kliuchevski, from the standpoint of the significance of the historical work he carried out.

Karamzin looked at the history of Russia for the first time from the standpoint of the Russian state and the rise of the monarchy as a unified whole, whilst Kliuchevsky did the same from the standpoint of the social, economic and legal history of Russia. Vadim Rogovin was the first to describe and think over the most important, complicated and falsified period of Russian history in the twentieth century, the period of the twenties and thirties.

Just as one cannot understand the history of old Russian society without studying the works of N. Karamzin and V. Kliuchevsky, one cannot understand what happened in Russia this century without studying Vadim Rogovin's books. I am therefore convinced that Vadim Rogovin's books will survive for centuries.

Ulrich Rippert

Dear Galia Ivanovna, dear mourners:

We have all lost a brilliant person and are deeply moved. Death snatched a person away from us whom many loved and who had friends all over the world.

What was remarkable about Vadim Zacharovich was his passionate search for historical truth. In his books and writings—which were translated into several languages—he resolutely opposed the biggest lie of this century, the identification of socialism with Stalinism. He raised the question as to whether there was an alternative to Stalinism, and answered it after studying the facts from every angle with an emphatic "Yes." He proved that Stalinism was neither unavoidable, nor the necessary consequence of the October Revolution, but rather was its negation.

I vividly remember the first time I met Vadim. He was at a seminar in Germany in 1993. At the beginning of his lecture Vadim spoke of the meaning of history as a science. He explained the difference between opinion and truth and said, "There is no country in which there is a way forward without a permanent striving for an understanding of the past in the most exact and detailed way possible."

The current crisis in this country shows that he was right. At the moment, we are witnessing the complete ruin of all those who regard historical truth as meaningless.

I often spoke at length with Vadim about this question during the long and extensive walks we took. Whoever knew him also knew his passion for long walks. One could easily run out of breath, not only because his thoughts covered a wide spectrum, but also because he walked briskly, with long strides. He loved life, socializing with friends, nature. He was very much interested in flowers and animals.

His passionate search for historical truth linked him to the great Marxists in this country. The year Vadim was born, 1937, Leon Trotsky answered the grotesque accusations made at the Moscow Trials: "Truth will triumph."

Vadim spoke to many thousands of people in Australia, the US, England, Germany and other countries. In the name of your friends and comrades in the International Committee of the Fourth International, I would like to express to you, dear Vadim Zacharovich, for the last time, our thanks and respect for your principled work. We will continue the fight for historical truth.

There is no doubt that Vadim Rogovin's books and writings will be an essential part of the education of a new generation of Marxists all over the world. That he was able to write these books despite his serious illness in the past years is above all thanks to the self-sacrificing love and care of his beloved wife, Galia Ivanovna.

In the not too distant future, our friend and comrade Vadim Rogovin will be recognized in Russia and the world as one of the greatest historians and one of the most genuine and principled people of his time.

We grieve at the loss of a great person, but he will live on in our hearts and in our memories, and there he will never die.



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