

The Zinoviev Letter: The Conspiracy that Never Dies

Gill Bennett

Oxford University Press (Nov 1, 2018)

Hardcover \$34.95 (368pp)

978-0-19-876730-5

Intelligence historian Gill Bennett's easy familiarity with Anglo-Soviet foreign policy and espionage imbues *The Zinoviev Letter* with impressive authoritativeness, untangling the 1924 "fake news" document from speculation to locate the truth.

The Zinoviev Letter, now considered a forgery, was first believed to have been written by a Bolshevik leader exhorting revolutionary activity to the British Communist Party. Its publication in the right-leaning *Daily Mail* four days before the 1924 general election influenced the results and stung Britain's first Labour Party government. Initial investigations did not lay the matter to rest, nor have subsequent reports from government bodies over the decades. Bennett herself was tasked with preparing the Foreign Office's 1999 Zinoviev Letter report, an investigation that included a fascinating week of research at intelligence archives in Moscow.

Devotees of international intrigue and modern history will dive right in, but for others, Bennett's extensive footnotes and abbreviations list will be enormously helpful in getting up to speed about British and Soviet intelligence agencies in the turbulent twentieth century. While densely factual, the clear prose describes swaggering historical figures, daredevil spies, and the "ghost of Zinoviev" swooping through the looming events of World War II, Stalin's brutal accumulation of power, the Cold War, and Margaret Thatcher's long leadership. The Zinoviev Letter has an eerie political relevance, having been resurrected in contemporary debates over Brexit and about the politicization of intelligence and Russian influence in Western democratic institutions.

In the final chapter, Bennett outlines her suspicions and conclusions about who among the Reds, Whites, and Blues (Soviets, White Russian émigrés, and Conservative Party members) may have orchestrated publication of this infamous document. However, like any first-rate piece of scholarship, the book raises as many questions as it answers. Bennett's book is a suspenseful and illuminating peek behind the veiled layers of secrecy underlying Western and Soviet intelligence operations.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (November/December 2018)

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