

World's Last Communist

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The incident will take place in 2020. This story proves that it is possible to write what will happen seventeen years from now. That the Soviet Union would be destroyed in 1991 could not be foretold even by the most noted Kremnologists of the world. Thousands of nuclear missiles that could burn the whole world and tear it into pieces remained asleep in their underground silos; the huge military army, the police, the KGB, millions of Party members deployed to overthrow the US, all kept mum like *thnuto Jagannath*.¹ We can easily term this incident the biggest paralysis of the world. Historians like Volkogonov have said many things after that. However, that Great Fall was only intimated in literature – from Bulgakov, Grossman, Lev Anatol to Solzhenitsyn and many others. Maybe it wasn't spoken out directly – but there was an indication, a pattern, or a form based on that pattern. Only literature can do that. It can change the meaning in the number – 2020. But this story will definitely take place.

In 2020, in a press conference in the White House lawn, speaking about the ongoing unstoppable progression of the American century, the United States President Arnold Schwarzenegger would add,

- ... And yes, let me tell you something fresh. The world's last Communist died yesterday. In Australia. At the age of 92. Even though he claims not to believe in god, God will bless his soul. There is not a single Communist left in our planet. The End of the Red...
- Reuters: But Mr President, how did you know that?
- Why? From the sources that give us faultless facts. CIA, FBI, and our comrade, the British MI5. The world is transparent today. There is nothing called secret information anywhere. At least for the White House.

But defying the logic of the US President, Kremlin would declare that President Schwarzenegger's words were not correct. The old man from Australia was not the last Communist in the world. The true last Communist was still alive, though on the verge of death. In a hospital in Rostov-on Don. His name was Vladimir Rubakov. He received the medal of "Soviet Union Brave" in the Second World War.

The journalist was Robert Doyle. He's a freelance writer. The Daily Reporter asked him in an e-mail to go to Moscow and cover a story on Rubakov. Doyle received that e-mail at night. The
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following day he reached Rostov-on-Don via the Aeroflot domestic flight services. He had no experience of domestic flight services in Russia before. The toilets were as dirty as the callousness of the air-hostesses. Russia hadn't got a touch civilized after thirty years of capitalism. The Russian capitalists were rumoured to buy the Manchester United. Doyle found out many such stories on the look-out for Rubakov. This had been always this way. Fragment after fragment. Just had to tie them together and make them look interesting, that's the point. After checking in at the Metropole hotel in Rostov-on-Don, Doyle went out with his unfailing friend, the laptop.

"Russia is probably the only country in the world whose hospitals still smell of iodoform or some such ancient disinfectant" - He was thinking of a beginning like this for his story as he entered the Boris Yeltsin Memorial Hospital. The receptionist girl said to him in broken English,

- Are you Mr Doyle?
- Yes, shall I show you my press card?
- No, no need of that. Maxim Vladimirovich Rubakov has been waiting for you for half an hour now. He'll take you to the patient cabin.

Maxim was walking towards Doyle. Doyle knew that Maxim was a professor in English. After shaking hands, Doyle asked him,

- How's your father now?
- He has consciousness left still. He's speaking without a pause. But sadly he's not replying to our words. The doctors also know that nothing can be done now. Moreover, both of his ears were badly damaged in the War. He cannot hear us. You are from Scotland, am I wrong?
- No, you are absolutely correct.
- I read Scottish still. Hugh MacDiarmid is my favourite poet. Have you read him?
- Have heard of him.

Maxim smiled as he opened the rusty doors of an ancient lift.

- I had a strong desire, you see, to work on MacDiarmid's poetry. I learnt Scottish only for that. If you want to read "First Hymn to Lenin" or "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle," you got to know Scottish. To be frank, I'm not that moved by Burns.

A fat matron on the corridor said something to Maxim in Russian. Maxim smiled,

- He's still speaking non-stop. Do you speak Russian?
- Not that much. But as a tourist, I could manage.
- Don't worry. I'll translate them.
- Tell me, everybody is saying that your father is the last Communist in the world! Do you believe in that?
- That is what the newspapers and the Televisions are showing. Even Kremlin is claiming that.
- But you? I'm asking what *you* think?

They were just about to enter the patient cabin. So Maxim could not reply to this question. A doctor went out. Monitoring machine. The curtains were embroidered with the designs of human joys and life. A nurse.

Old Rubakov was lying on a bed which was lifted a little. He was old, very old, but not lean, wide forehead, spiky white hair, eyes closed. Now suddenly opened. He had been speaking in a clear voice since yesterday...Of the Stalingrad Front... The old man called out someone,

- Rubin! Rubin!

Maxim continued,

- Rubin was the best friend of my father. The son of the famous Communist leader in Spain, Dolores Ibárruri. They fought together in Spain. Rubin died in the Stalingrad Battle. My father was with him then.

The old man was saying something louder now which included Rubin's name too.

- My father is telling Rubin that Rubin you can't die so fast. The German dive bombers, the stuka, are no longer in the sky. Now the sky is conquered by our Sturmovik aircrafts. All the land around has been secured by our T-34 tanks. The light you see in the sky comes from our Katyusha rockets. Rubin you just can't die now. Rubin, Comrade Stalin is telling us, Rubin, your valenki...

The old man started panting,

Maxim went on,

- Valenki is the snow felt boot. The Red Army wore this. It used to have a pair of woollen socks inside. The Germans did not have the valenki. They were frozen. The day Rubin died, the temperature outside was minus forty four degree. He's crying because Rubin was dead now. He was speaking of Rubin yesterday too.

The panting stopped now. Deep breaths. The lips shook a little...He was now speaking in German. Doyle knew German, it meant, "Who's this guy Zokov?" The old man laughed mildly as he spoke about this. Doyle thought so.

Maxim explained to him,

- This is a joke from the Red Army. The German Major General von Rundstedt told this in sheer amazement in February, 1942. He was bewildered by the fact that Russian Marshal Zukov was the son of a poor farmer. The Prussian Junker could not recover from this. The Red Army would always refer to that in mirth. There were many jokes like that during the War. So many have I heard from my father...

Suddenly the nurse stood up staring at something. She looked at the monitor. Then started calling.... The old man's breathing went long as if he was pulling heavy objects aside; then the left hand raised... the doctor entered in a haste...

- Rubin!

The eyes were open now. He's searching for someone or something. Who? What? A comrade? The hand of a comrade? Or a rifle that had fallen from a hand mutilated by the bullets? Doyle looked out of the window. The birch trees were shivering. Was there a storm outside? A weird sound was coming from the old man. The doctor said something to the nurse. The nurse picked up the ampoule, inserted the syringe. The old man bellowed a few words, in a mumble. Then there was nothing. Maxim told Doyle after his father's death,

- What my father said in the end was the last message of warning sent to von Paulus by Rokossovsky – the physical condition of your soldiers is regrettable. They are victims of hunger, disease, and heavy winter. The ruthless winter has just started. The snow-rain, heavy wind, and the snowstorm are yet to arrive. Your soldiers do not have adequate clothes for the winter...Hundred and sixty thousand people died in the Battle of Stalingrad, ninety thousand were imprisoned.

A mild snow-storm would also pass through Rostov-on-Don that night. After sending the reports to London, Doyle would watch a circus show on the Russian Television for a while. The Siberian tigers were now in the circus arena. Jumping through the burning rings of fire. Then he would switch off the TV and go to bed.

On the same night, the sailors and workers of the Baltic naval port would declare mutiny. The spark of the rebellion would expand to the Moscow garrisons. Thousands of workers would come out in the street crushing the snow with their boots and holding the red flag. The walls of Kremlin would be hit by the slogans of the storm. St. Petersburg would turn into Stalingrad again.

The same night, the Indonesian Communists, not without guns this time, would declare their insurgency. Port after port in Australia would join in the strike. The tin workers in Bolivia would burn everything with rage – Holding the photos of Lenin and Che, the students and the middle class people would capture all the capital cities of Latin America. In France, Italy, Greece, and Spain, the workers' movement would put everything to a standstill... the same news would arrive from Africa, from the world of the Arabs.

The Communists will come back from every part of the world. Yes. They will. But for that, each and every minute and hour of the next seventeen years has to be utilized well. The Communists will return all over the world. They have to. And the world will shake, not for ten days this time, but for ten thousand years.

This piece of truth is reported in this story.

----- Translated by Sourit Bhattacharya

Glossary:

(“Prithibir Sesh Communist” or “World’s Last Communist” was published in the Bengali magazine *Kalantar* in 2003)

1 Thnuto Jagannath is a popular Bengali expression for impotent and helpless.