

Truman, zhdanov, and the origins of the cold war

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



In the West our assumptions about the meaning of the term “ democracy” have not really changed since Truman appealed to Congress for financial aid to assist the democratic government in Greece in 1945. We do not generally disagree that democracy involves “ free institutions, representative government, free elections, guaranties of individual liberty” (Ransom Reader, 150), nor that people should be able to live their lives “ free from coercion” (ibid, 150). To see the Soviet counter-arguments is a revelation, and in many ways a surprise.

Zhdanov’s argument in his “ The Two Camp Policy” speech presents an entirely different view of the world, and of world history, and the assumptions in his account were certain to lead to the irresolvable conflicts which constituted theCold War.

Zhdanov argued that western policy from before the Second World War had always been corrupt and self-serving. The west supported Hitler for a long time because they saw him as “ capable of inflicting a blow on the Soviet Union” (ibid, 158).

America only joined the war “ when the issue was already decided” (ibid, 159), thus saving herself casualties and significant loss. The United States, he implies, was driven only by self-interest, and no genuine desire to see freedom prevail in the world.

The United States’ Policy after the war was dominated by the need of “ the Wall Street bosses” (ibid, 159) to rebuild profits, and therefore to establish new markets. Foreign policy was therefore “ expansionist and reactionary”

(ibid, 159) in order to maintain “ imperialist” influence to ensure markets for capitalist enterprises.

Truman’s claim that the defence of the government in Greece was a moral matter, a humanitarian concern to protect “ National integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes” (ibid, 150) was therefore bogus and dishonest.

This meant a determination “ to combat socialism and democracy and to support reactionary and antidemocratic profascist regimes and movements everywhere” (ibid, 160). The United States, Zhdanov claimed, was seeking to dominate the world for the sake of capitalist profit, and not for any genuine love of freedom.

All true, but perhaps merge quotes a little bit, and in your own words interpret what point he is trying to get at. Why is this such a big deal for Zhdanov? What point is he trying to make about the US and their post-WWII plans? Thus Zhdanov’s notion of democracy begins to emerge.

The western model he dismissed as “ bourgeois pseudodemocracy” (ibid, 161). It is an error, he argued, that democracy is characterized by “ a plurality of parties and ... an organized opposition” (ibid, 161).

This belief involves a misunderstanding of history and of the nature of socialism. “ Capitalists and landlords, antagonistic classes, and hence a plurality of parties, have long ceased to exist in the U. S. S. R. ” (ibid, 161), and this is an inevitable development in a socialist state. The people are the state, he argued, and therefore the class conflicts which lead in western countries to differences of interests, simply will(did) not occur.

The United States' cynical claim to defend freedom was in fact a defence of "the bloody dictatorship of the fascist minority" (ibid, 161) over the people of Greece and Turkey. America itself was marked by "national and racial oppression, the corruption and the unceremonious abrogation of democratic rights" (ibid, 161), and the policy of the United States was to "create a bloc of states" which would be blackmailed into supporting the United States line through the use of economic power, and thus give up their own independence and freedom.

What about the other aspect to Zhdanov's definition of democracy? Particularly in how he differentiates himself (and USSR) from what is wrong about the United States (what makes them un-democratic).

According to Zhdanov, The west, and particularly capitalist America, was the enemy of all "anti-imperialist and democratic" (ibid, 160) nations. Truman's arguments had at least the realism of moderation. "No government is perfect" (ibid, 149), he acknowledged, and certainly the newly democratic Greek government was not perfect.

Zhdanov's argument for the one-party system sounds either hopelessly idealistic, or utterly dishonest. The catastrophic purges of the 1930s and later make the claims about freedom very questionable, and suggest, according to Thomson, that "the nemesis of monolithic parties is self destruction, and the price of absolute power absolute corruption" (Thomson, 721).

Stalin was determined to remove all opposition, and concentrated on destroying those who had held rank in the Communist party during the 20s and 30s, men like Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek, Sokolnikov and Tukhashevsky.

Thousand were arrested, in all walks of life, and many went to their deaths, or to long Siberian imprisonment. This hardly supports Zhdanov's claim that opposition would simply not exist. < If you use this quote, you need to explain it a little further.

What are the purges, and how do they negate Zhdanov's notion of democracy? The Stalinist line, described here by Zhdanov, drove the world into forty years of dangerous confrontation, before the ultimate collapse of the system and its ideology.

A corresponding paranoia in the west led to aggressive stand-offs in Europe, where large numbers of NATO troops were stationed in Germany; in the Middle East, where The Arab-Israeli conflict often took the form of war by proxy between east and west; and in South East Asia, where the Korean War and later the Vietnam War were caused partly by the United States' neurosis about communism. The arming of the Mujahedin in Afghanistan in the 1980s was one of the last policy errors of the Cold War, and one of which we are now suffering some of the unforeseen results.

How did the United States contribute to this conflict? Where are some areas in the world where we see this conflict occurring, between the United State's notion of democaracy and the Soviet Union's?

Works Cited

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