

# Re-Elected, Zyuganov Defends Stalin's Grave

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Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov surrounded by party faithful during last year's Victory Day celebrations. **Igor Tabakov**

Gennady Zyuganov, re-elected Saturday as leader of the Communist Party, a position he's held for 17 years, said Tuesday that public calls to remove Stalin's and Brezhnev's graves from the Kremlin Wall Necropolis came from "provocateurs" and "SS loyalists."

He vowed that his party would continue to fight proposals to rebury the leaders, as well as hundreds of other communists who have their final resting places at the Kremlin.

Zyuganov, 68, has served as leader for the vast majority of the post-Soviet Communist Party's 20-year history, and his re-election came amid a chorus of criticism from fellow party members and leftist activists that his reign has amounted to a dictatorship.

The weekend congress passed amendments to the party's charter granting more powers to

the party's presidium and streamlining the procedure for dismissing a member or dissolving a regional branch.

Former party members and other Communist activists publicly criticized a draft of the new charter earlier this month, saying it further deprived rank-and-file members of rights and granted "dictator powers" to the party's elite.

Boris Kagarlitsky, head of the independent Institute of Globalization and Social Movements, said Zyuganov's re-election means he has "successfully eliminated his critics," who pointed to "failures of his policies."

The Communist boss and his Kremlin-aligned party need not care about popularity ratings as long as the ruling United Russia party remains in power, Kagarlitsky said by phone.

Talking to reporters Saturday, Zyuganov denied that his party was split or that the new leadership had been formed in an undemocratic way.

The Communist Party has never been so "unanimous and united," Zyuganov said in comments carried by Interfax. He emphasized that he had not interfered in the appointment of candidates to the party's ruling bodies.

The party's weekend congress saw the re-election of two of Zyuganov's long-term deputies — Ivan Melnikov, 62, and Vladimir Kashin, 64 — as well as the election of two new deputy leaders: Dmitry Novikov, 43, and Andrei Klychkov, 33.

"Zyuganov has created a cohort of young wolves who will protect him [from attacks of critics]," said Alexei Mukhin, head of the Center for Political Information.

In October, a group of Communists, including former party members, published an open letter criticizing the party's leadership, Vedomosti reported last week. In December, a congress of Communist groups demanded Zyuganov's dismissal at the then-upcoming election.

The October and the December events are related to infighting to become Zyuganov's successor, an official close to the Kremlin told Vedomosti.

But the Communist leader can't leave his post even if he wants to because his party has become a "brand" and "any changes" to that brand could lead to the party's "destruction," Mukhin said. Besides, Zyuganov has "cleaned up his environment" from critics, so now there is "no one to replace him," the pundit said.

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