

Molotov, V.M.
(Vyacheslav Mikhailovich)
(1890-1986)



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Joined R.S.D.L.P. in 1905 and a Bolshevnik since 1909; met Lenin while in exile in London. Molotov escaped from prison in Siberia in 1915 and returned to Petrograd to become, with Alexander Shlyapnikov, one of the leading Bolshevniks in Petrograd. He was editor of Pravda in 1917 until Kamenev and Stalin attacked him for his ardent opposition to the Provisional Government, after which he was appointed a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee which organised the October Revolution.

In 1920, he was elected to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and by 1924 he became a member of the Politburo. Molotov became president of the Comintern from 1928-1934, president of the Council of People's Commissars, 1930-41, and foreign minister, 1939-49, 1953-56, in which capacity he was the signatory for the Pact with Hitler in 1939. In "honour" of his role in this deal, and the Soviet annexation of Eastern Poland and Finland that went with it, Finnish partisans gave his name to the "Molotov cocktail." (e.g. the incendiary mix of Germans and Russians, oil and water) Molotov was a participant in the post-war negotiations with the Western powers. In 1957 Molotov was removed from his post in the Central Committee, and became USSR ambassador to Mongolia due to his opposition to Khrushchev's de-Stalinization program. From 1960-62 Molotov served as the ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Commission, and after 45 years of government service, Molotov is expelled from the party. In 1984, after decades of effort, Molotov's party membership is re-instated. He died in Moscow on 8th November, 1986, one day after the 69th anniversary of the revolution. He was 96.

"I admire those people who went to the gallows for their ideas. A man could be told, 'Just one word – give up and you'll start a good life.' But a Bolshevnik choose the gallows. He chooses the gallows!"

Molotov Remembers, ed. Felix Chuev, Jan. 16, 1973 conversation, p. 227

The Biographer Felix Chuev writes about Molotov's final years:

Molotov lived at the Zhukovka dacha from July 8, 1966, to June 27, 1986. Until the very last day he tried to do everything himself, Tatiana Afanasievna Tarasova, the housekeeper, told us. He was a very strongwilled person. Even when he was almost unable to walk, he tried to walk as far as the sixth post. You would say, stop at the fourth post, Viacheslav Mikhailovich!

No, not until the sixth!

Among the sheets of paper Molotov covered with crabbed writing during his last days, there is one on which he sketched out theses he had intended to work out:

"1. The fundamental principle of socialism (in contrast to communism) is fulfillment of norms of labor established by society. "2. The Communist party is the party of the working class (not of all the people). "3. Democracy under socialism."

He returned to these questions time after time during the years of our meetings. Apparently he would have liked to chat with the current leadership about problems of socialism, and he said something of the kind to his housekeeper:

"Phone Smirtiukov, the administrative director of the Council of Ministers. Ask him if Gorbachev could find the time to speak with me. Nothing came of it.

His mind worked as in former years. It was only at the very end that a decline became noticeable. Shortly before his death, he read the last page of Pravda, laid down the paper, and said, "Invite Shevardnadze to see me at 5 p.m." Apparently Molotov was agitated over some international problem, and he reverted to his former role as a member of the Politburo, first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, and minister of foreign affairs. Members of his household thought he would forget all about it by 5pm but by that time he had put on his suit and necktie. They told him that Comrade Shevardnadze was busy and could not accept...

He survived eleven heads of the country. He was born under Alexander III and died under Gorbachev.

At his funeral I had said, 'We bid farewell today to a fighter for communism, to Lenin's last surviving comrade-in-arms.'

Molotov Remembers, ed. Felix Chuev, p. 418-19