

REMINISCENCES  
*of* **LENIN**  
BY HIS RELATIVES

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**WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!**



REMINISCENCES

OF

LENIN

BY HIS

RELATIVES

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## FOREWORD

This book contains reminiscences of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin by his sisters Anna and Maria, his brother Dmitry, and his wife N. K. Krupskaya.

It consists mainly of excerpts from Anna Ulyanova-Yelizarova's *Reminiscences of Ilyich* and from the book by Dmitry Ulyanov and Maria Ulyanova *About Lenin*, both published in 1934 by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. There are, besides, additional reminiscences by Dmitry and Maria, and by N. K. Krupskaya, also published previously in different periodicals, etc.

The reminiscences included in the present book refer to various periods of V. I. Lenin's life and work. Most of them relate to his childhood and youth and to his revolutionary activity in the years before the October Revolution, while some deal with his work in the post-revolutionary period.

The reminiscences of Lenin's relatives, giving as they do a graphic picture of his personality, will contribute to a better knowledge of the life and work of the founder and leader of the Communist Party, the architect of the Soviet socialist state.

Institute of Marxism-Leninism  
of the C.C., C.P.S.U.





A. I. ULYANOVA-YELIZAROVA

**REMINISCENCES  
OF ILYICH**



## I. THE FAMILY

### *(Lenin's Parents and Their Time)*

Vladimir Ilyich's father, Ilya Nikolayevich, was born into a family of poor townfolk in Astrakhan. His father died when he was seven years old and he owed his education (he graduated from Kazan University) entirely to his elder brother, Vasily Nikolayevich. Later in life Ilya Nikolayevich often spoke with gratitude of his brother who had been a father to him, and would tell us, his children, how much Vasily Nikolayevich had done for him. He told us that Vasily Nikolayevich himself had had a great desire to study, but after his father's death, which occurred when he was quite young, he was the sole support of the family, which consisted of his mother, two sisters and younger brother. He had to take a job in an office and abandon all dreams of education. But he made up his mind that if he could not get an education himself, he would at least see to it that his brother did.

When the latter finished gymnasium, Vasily Nikolayevich sent him to Kazan University and continued to help him until Ilya Nikolayevich, who had been trained to work from childhood, began to keep himself by giving lessons. Vasily Nikolayevich never married and devoted his life to his mother, sisters and brother.

Ilya Nikolayevich's years at the University coincided with the grim reign of Nicholas I, when Russia groaned under the yoke of serfdom. The majority of the population were nothing but slaves whom the landlords could flog, exile to Siberia, sell like cattle, separate from their families or marry off at will. The peasants, downtrodden, oppressed and denied education, were wholly illiterate.

From time to time there were sporadic outbreaks against the more brutal landlords and their manor-houses were set on fire; but the peasant outbreaks of those days were not organized, they were rigorously suppressed and the villages plunged again into darkness and despair, with vodka as the only consolation and means of escape. And for the more rebellious spirits, those who would not give in, there was only one thing to do—flee to the steppes and forests and become highwaymen.

*Hard, indeed, were those days,  
When a man had to part  
With his old village ways,  
With all dear to his heart;  
With his home and his wife,  
With his kin and his kind,  
Aye, and even with life,  
Hoping freedom to find,*

said a folk-song.

The oppression suffered by the vast majority of the people, the "lower" classes, as they were then called, preyed on the minds of those members of the "upper" classes who loved their country deeply and sincerely. Bitterly resenting despotism and influenced by the revolutions in Western Europe, they discussed the need for freedom of speech, the press and assembly, the advan-

tages of the elective principle of government and, first and foremost, the need to abolish serfdom—that shame which had long been abolished in Europe. The boldest ended on the gallows or rotted away in penal servitude, like the Decembrists (1825) or Petrashevsky's group (1848). The rest were silenced or only dared to whisper furtively in the deepest secrecy.

As Nekrasov put it:

*All around is in morning gloom,*

*Whirlwinds of madness and spite  
Threaten my country with doom,  
Destroying all good, all light.*

The oppression became well-nigh unbearable after the revolutionary wave of 1848 swept across Europe. Nicholas I, who stood on guard for autocracy as the gendarme of Europe, sent Russian troops to shed their blood suppressing the revolution in Hungary. So strong was tsarism in those days that it could afford to suppress revolts not only at home but also in the neighbouring countries.

At home, meanwhile, the slightest manifestation of free thought was crushed. This oppression weighed heavily on the students. Only in their intimate circles did the young people dare to speak their minds freely and sing forbidden songs with words by Ryleyev and other poets.

Years later, while walking in the fields and woods far from town, Ilya Nikolayevich would sing those songs to his children.

Only those who had lived through those grim times could understand the great relief that was felt when, with the death of Nicholas I and the accession of his son Alexander II, Russia entered a period of reforms.

The first of these was the abolition of serfdom. The decision was mainly motivated by the need of developing capitalist industry for workers and by the growth of discontent and outbreaks among the peasants. Alexander II had good reason to say in this connection: "We must hasten to give freedom from above before the people take it from below."

The emancipation of the peasants was such a stride forward that jubilation swept the country. The mood found apt expression in Nekrasov's words:

*Though we are freed of feudal chains,  
Others will act as a counterpart.  
Yet breaking these will take less pains.  
Muse! welcome freedom with good heart!*

Of course, disillusionment came quickly. The first to sound the alarm was that great man of foresight Chernyshevsky, who had to pay for this with life-long imprisonment and exile in Siberia.

Revolutionary organizations of young people also began to spring up. And to people of peaceful inclinations, to educational workers, great opportunities offered themselves after the rigour of Nicholas's regime, and they eagerly seized them. New law-courts, the incomparably greater freedom of the press and, finally, public education attracted the advanced people of that time. The possibility of enlightening the former slaves appealed to many.

Among these was Ilya Nikolayevich. He gladly accepted the newly established post of inspector of elementary schools in Simbirsk Gubernia. Before that he had been teaching in a gymnasium, where he was very popular with his pupils. He was conscientious and patient in his explanations, treated his pupils' pranks with indulgence and used to prepare poor pupils for examina-

tions free of charge. He was a born teacher and was fond of his work. But he yearned for a wider scope and for an opportunity to impart knowledge not to the more well-to-do pupils of the gymnasiums, but to those who trod the stoniest path to education—the children of the poor, of yesterday's slaves.

And the scope that opened before him was indeed wide. The few schools that functioned in Simbirsk Gubernia were of poor quality. Pupils were crowded into dirty, cramped class-rooms, the teachers were poorly trained and depended chiefly on their fists for implanting learning. Everything had to be done from scratch—peasants had to be persuaded to build new schools, other means of raising money for these schools had to be found, training courses for young teachers had to be organized in order to acquaint them with the latest teaching methods—and Ilya Nikolayevich, the only inspector for the whole gubernia, had to find time for all this.

His work was made difficult by the state of the roads at that time, which were rough, impassable during rains or spring thaws, and bumpy in winter. He had to leave home for weeks or even months on end and eat and sleep in dirty roadside inns, though his constitution was far from strong. But love for his work and remarkable diligence and persistence triumphed over all difficulties, and during the 17 years that Ilya Nikolayevich held his post the number of schools in the gubernia rose to 450. The courses that he organized turned out teachers of a new type who were known as "Ulyanov's teachers."

His work expanded. He was gradually provided with a staff of assistant inspectors and himself eventually appointed director. His tasks became more administrative in character, but he still remained the same hard worker as before and a man of simple habits and demeanour. Teachers would come to him without ceremony to seek his advice, and if one of them fell ill Ilya Nikolayevich



would occasionally take over from him. His earnings went to maintain his large family and educate his children; he spent very little on himself and had no taste for social life and pleasures. As a form of recreation from his work he preferred talking to people interested in this work. He also liked to rest in the family circle, looking after the upbringing of his children, and he was very fond of chess. Exacting towards himself and others at work, he could be a gay and entertaining companion when relaxing with his family—full of jokes, fairy tales and funny stories. When he talked and played games (chess, croquet, etc.) with his children, he was more like a comrade to them, enjoying himself no less than they did.

He burnt himself out early in life in his noble work and died suddenly of cerebral haemorrhage on January 12, 1886, in his 55th year.

Vladimir Ilyich's mother, Maria Alexandrovna, was the daughter of a doctor who had very advanced ideas for his time. She spent most of her childhood and early youth in the country. Her father had limited means and a large family, and the young girl, brought up by a stern aunt, was accustomed from an early age to work and thrift. Her father gave his daughters a Spartan upbringing—summer and winter alike the girls wore short-sleeved and open-necked calico dresses, and even of those each girl had but two. Their food was simple; even when they grew up they never had tea or coffee, both of which their father considered harmful to health. As the result of this regime Maria Alexandrovna grew up sturdy and strong.

She was of a steadfast and firm disposition, but at the same time cheerful and friendly. A woman of great capacity, she studied foreign languages and music and read a great deal.