

My Recollections
OF
LENIN

By
KLARA ZETKIN

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

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OF
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Moscow 1956

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The present English translation of Clara Zetkin's *My Recollections of Lenin* follows the Russian edition of *Gospolitizdat*, Moscow 1955.

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PREFACE

to the Russian edition of 1955

The present edition of Clara Zetkin's *My Recollections of Lenin* comprises the following items published before by IMEL: *My Recollections of Lenin* (January 1924); *From My Memorandum Book* (January 1925); and *Lenin and the Masses* (January 1929). It also contains a foreword by Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya.

Clara Zetkin's recollections tell the story of the meetings with Lenin in 1920, 1921, and 1922. She sets forth his views on art, culture, the international women's movement, the German revolutionary movement, and other problems.

The authoress of these memoirs was one of the most eminent figures of the international working-class movement. Her book will be helpful in studying the life and work of the great Lenin.

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



FOREWORD

by Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya

Clara Zetkin's utterances about Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, including her recollections of him, are of particular interest because she herself was an outstanding champion of the cause of the working class, a shock worker of the world revolution. Last year, on her seventy-fifth birthday, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) sent her ardent greetings:

"To you, veteran of the international working-class movement, tribune of the proletarian revolution, hoary leader of the Communist International, friend and comrade of the labouring masses of the U.S.S.R., and protagonist of the emancipation of working women, the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. (B.) sends its heartfelt Bolshevik greetings on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the day of your birth. A companion-in-arms of Engels, you fought tirelessly against opportunism in the Second International and wielded the full force of your great mind and revolutionary passion in opposition to Bernsteinism, to revisionism. In the days when the world-wide slaughter began and the bigwigs of the Second International to their utter disgrace harnessed themselves to the war chariot of imperialism, you bore aloft, together with Lenin, together with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the banner of proletarian internationalism. You were

with us in the October days and the days of battle in the Civil War, when counterrevolution all over the world sought to throttle the world's first proletarian state. A wholeheartedly devoted friend of the U.S.S.R., you are always at your battle station when the enemy threatens the Land of Soviets. The Central Committee fervently wishes and firmly believes that for many years to come you will still be fighting in the front ranks of the Communist International."

But this wish was not destined to come true. She did not even live to be seventy-six; but the last months of her life clearly exemplified the truth of the characterization given her by the Central Committee.

Clara Zetkin was elected to the Reichstag and as she happened to be its oldest member it was her right and duty to open it. Nobody expected her to be physically able to do so. She was then living in a holiday home near Moscow, barely strong enough to rise from her bed and gasping every minute for breath. But when the Communist Party of Germany wrote to her that it was desirable for her to come, she never hesitated a moment. She gathered all her remaining strength and went, taking along a supply of camphor and various emergency drugs. She knew the danger she was facing, the danger of falling into the hands of the fascists and of being done to death by them. But this did not deter her. With a supreme effort she managed to deliver the opening speech—the splendid oration of a Communist by conviction. Going beyond the purlieu of the Reichstag and addressing the whole working people of Germany, she spoke to them about Russia, of the need to fight, of socialist revolution. She closed with the following words:

"I open the Reichstag in discharge of my duty as its presiding senior member and hope that despite my present infirmity I shall yet have the good fortune to open,

as its presiding senior member, the First Congress of Soviets of Soviet Germany!"

On her return to Russia Clara Zetkin felt her strength ebbing, but she did not give up work. Lying sick in her deathbed she dictated the pamphlet *Lenin's Legacies to the Women of the World*. Its last words read:

"A great goal brightens the world. This historic moment demands the most resolute struggle. It imperatively dictates to all proletarian women, to all women of toil: look, realize, act, fight, fight! This great moment will not brook women's narrow horizons. Widen your ranks, march on, ye millions of unknown, nameless fighters! You are destined to win. You must take your place in the ranks of those who execute Lenin's legacies and continue his immortal teachings and works internationally. Be worthy continuers of Lenin's cause, worthy pupils of Lenin."

I was at Clara's on the first and second of May and told her about the congress of men and women collective farmers. Afterwards she wrote a letter to the women of the Krasnaya Pakhra collective farm on the importance of the collective farm movement, explaining that Comrade Stalin's Congress speech about women on the collective farm ought to inspire them and serve them as a guide to action.

Vladimir Ilyich was very fond of Clara Zetkin and held her in high esteem as a stalwart revolutionary, a thorough Marxist and an implacable foe of opportunism in the Second International. He enjoyed heart-to-heart talks with her on subjects he was engrossed in. He liked to discuss aspects of problems which he did not moot officially. He conversed with her on art, cultural development, the international women's movement, the German movement, and other themes he was keenly interested in, because he knew that she had given much thought to these issues, had raised them in all their broadness, and that she could appreciate his ideas.

Clara Zetkin's reminiscences of Lenin and her articles and speeches about him are evidence of how highly she valued the man, how close and dear the Soviet land was to her heart and how gripped she was by the ever-expanding socialist construction in our country. Her Lenin articles were written in a style somewhat different from ours. There is more of revolutionary fervour in them, more of what I should call the international sweep, a somewhat different frame within which she fits her recollections of Lenin. These features give a peculiar flavour and value to these reminiscences. It is important, essential for us to know what Clara Zetkin, who loved Lenin so dearly, had to say about him.

N. Krupskaya

August 10, 1933



MY RECOLLECTIONS OF LENIN

In these dismal hours of sorrow, when each one of us is stricken with deepest grief, when we all become conscious of the fact that one irreplaceable has departed from our midst, the clear living memory of him who is gone rises before us revealing, as if in a flash of lightning, the great man embodied in the great leader. Lenin's personality bears the impress of harmonious fusion of greatness as a leader and greatness as a man. Thanks to this peculiar feature the image of Lenin—to use the words in which Marx assayed the glorious deeds of the fighters of the Commune—"is forever engraved in the great heart of the working class." For the labouring masses—all those who have fallen victim to wealth, all those who have no knowledge of the conventional lies and the hypocrisy of the bourgeois world—with delicate instinct discern the difference between what is true and what is false, between modest greatness and bumptious swagger, between love for them expressed in action and a hunt for popularity reflecting mere vanity.

I consider it my duty to make public every scrap of information contained in my treasure store of personal recollections of our unforgettable leader and friend. I owe it to Vladimir Ilyich and I owe it to those to whom he devoted his whole activity—the proletarians and working

people in general, those who are exploited, or drudge in involuntary servitude in any part of the world, those to whom he directed his love and upon whom he proudly looked as revolutionary fighters and builders of a higher social order.

It was early in the autumn of 1920 that I met Lenin for the first time after the outbreak of the Russian Revolution that shook the entire world. It happened right after my arrival in Moscow, during a Party meeting held, if my memory serves me right, in the Sverdlov Hall of the Kremlin. Lenin looked unchanged; he had hardly aged, as far as I was able to tell. I could swear he wore the same modest, carefully brushed jacket I had seen him in when we met for the very first time, in 1907, at the World Congress of the Second International in Stuttgart. Rosa Luxemburg, who had the sharp eye of the artist that detects every distinctive feature, pointed out Lenin to me with the words: "Take a good look at that man. He's Lenin. Note his cranium: how stubborn, strong-willed it is."

In speech and behaviour Lenin had not changed. At times the debates were very lively, even passionate. As he used to do before, at Second International congresses, so now Lenin paid close attention to the course of the discussion, displayed great self-possession, and evinced a calmness that betrayed his inner concentration, energy and resilience. This was shown by his interjections, remarks and regular speeches when he took the floor. It seemed that nothing worthwhile noticing escaped his keen glance and lucid mind. I was struck at that meeting, as I had usually been before and was ever after, by these most characteristic features of Lenin—his simplicity and cordiality, his naturalness in all his dealings with comrades. I say "naturalness" because it was my definite impression that that man could not behave otherwise

than he did. His attitude towards comrades was the natural expression of his whole inner being.

Lenin was the unchallenged leader of a party which deliberately entered the battle for power, explained the goal and pointed the way to Russia's proletariat and peasantry. Invested with their confidence the Party administers the country and exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin was the leader of the great country that became the first proletarian state in the world. His thoughts and desires dwell in the minds of millions of people also beyond the frontiers of Soviet Russia. His opinion on any issue is decisive throughout our land; his name is the symbol of hope and emancipation wherever oppression and enslavement exist.

"Comrade Lenin leads us to communism. In spite of all hardships we shall hold out," declared the Russian workers. And imbued with the vision of the ideal kingdom, mankind's highest society, they rushed to the front hungry and freezing or harnessed themselves to the titanic task of restoring the economic life of the country in the face of incredible odds.

"We have no reason to be afraid the landlords may return and take the land away from us. Ilyich and the Bolsheviks together with the Red Army men will come to our rescue." Thus figured the peasants, whose land hunger had been satisfied.

"Long Live Lenin!" was a frequent inscription on church walls in Italy, whose proletarians enthusiastically hailed the Russian Revolution as their own emancipator. The name of Lenin became the rallying cry, both in America, Japan, and India, of all those who challenged the rule of the vested interests.

How simple and modest was Lenin's manner of speaking! Yet he had already accomplished a gigantic historical task and upon his shoulders rested the colossal weight of unlimited confidence, of the gravest responsi-

bility, and of unceasing work. He completely merged in the mass of the comrades, was of the same stuff as they, was just one of many. Unlike so-called "leading person-ages" he never wanted to exert pressure, and never did so by a single gesture or facial expression. Such ways were contrary to his nature and he really was a striking personality.

Messengers would constantly deliver communications from various establishments, both civil and military, and he would at once send off his reply in a few lines quickly jotted down. Lenin had a smile and a friendly nod for everyone. This was invariably answered by a joyful lighting-up of the face. During sessions he would from time to time converse with responsible officials on urgent problems, making sure not to distract others. When an intermission was announced Lenin had to withstand a veritable onslaught. Clusters of people surrounded him on all sides—men and women, from Petrograd, Moscow and diverse other centres of the movement. He was beset by a particularly great number of the youth. Each one of them wanted him to endorse his pet scheme. And thus petitions, inquiries and proposals just showered down upon him.

Lenin heard out and answered everyone with a patience that won him the hearts of all. He listened to every plaint with sympathetic understanding and was always ready to help, whether it was a matter of Party work or a tale of personal woe. It gladdened one's soul to watch how he dealt with the youth: an unalloyed comradely attitude, free from the pedantry, preceptorial tone of voice and presumptuousness of manner paraded by those of middle age who believe that their years, without more, confer upon them incomparable superiority and virtue.

Lenin always conducted himself as an equal among equals. There was not a trace of the potentate in him.