

TRACY B. STRONG & HELENE KEYSSAR

RIGHT IN HER SOUL

THE
LIFE OF

ANNA LOUISE STRONG

The indomitable American journalist
whose circle included Trotsky, Stalin,
Borodin, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mao Tse-tung,
Chou En-lai...and who left her own
indelible imprint on the history
of the twentieth century





RIGHT IN HER SOUL



The Life of
Anna Louise
Strong



Tracy B. Strong
and Helene Keyssar



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First Edition

RIGHT
IN HER
SOUL

For our children

Foreword



Wee shall finde that the God of Israell is among us, when tenn of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when hee shall make us a prayse and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England: for wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty on a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us; so that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world, wee shall open the mouths of enemies to speake evill of the wayes of god and all professours for Gods sake; wee shall shame the faces of many of gods worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into Curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whether wee are goeing.

—John Winthrop, *Christian
Charitie. A modell hereof.*

So many deeds cry out to be done,
And always urgently;
The world rolls on,
Time presses.
Ten thousand years are too long,
Seize the day, seize the hour!

—Mao Tse-tung, "Reply to
Comrade Kuo Mo-jo"

Anna Louise Strong was born in 1885 in a two-room parsonage in Friend, Nebraska. She died in 1970 in Peking, China, where she was buried with full honors in the Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery. During the years between, she bore witness to most of the upheavals of our century. From 1919 until her death she followed the revolutionary uprisings in Russia, Mexico, Spain and China, writing millions of words to try to persuade her fellow Americans that the social transformations occurring in these lands were to be celebrated rather than feared.

No one who met Anna Louise Strong ever forgot her. She traveled on a journalist's visa, but she was determined to shape the news as well as to report it. She organized labor, marched with revolutionary armies and participated in the events she described in her writings. Her intelligence

and candid commitment to the left as well as her diligence won her the attention and often the trust of leaders around the world. She knew Trotsky well, dined in the White House with Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt, and with Stalin's blessing edited the first English-language newspaper in the Soviet Union. In the years before 1949 she carried news from Chou En-lai and Mao Tse-tung to the West, and during the sixties her *Letters from China* provided the West with a unique perspective on Vietnam, the Cultural Revolution and other major developments in the Far East.

She understood the challenges of the twentieth century in worldwide terms, but the country she most passionately hoped to save was her own. Throughout her life she remained quintessentially American, and in a peculiarly American tradition, her radicalism had a strong evangelical tinge. She learned the gospel of political and spiritual reform in childhood from her father, a Congregational minister, and she followed it unswervingly ever after. "By words and life," she remembered, "he taught me that neither money nor fame nor human opinion are to be counted against being 'right in one's soul.' "

Tall and statuesque, with riveting blue eyes and a voice that could cut across a room full of conversation, Anna Louise commanded attention by her presence as well as by her deeds. Always a maverick among the American "Reds," she cleared her own path but cherished association with any who shared even a small part of her vision. She did not so much join the American left as repeatedly make herself over into a member. As a leader in the child welfare movement in the years before World War I, she came to know many of the men and women who were attempting to change or remedy the inequities of American society. Lincoln Steffens, Roger Baldwin, Jane Addams, Owen Lovejoy, Norman Hapgood, Ben Lindsey, Luther Gulick, "Mother" Ella Bloor, Emma Goldman and Max Eastman were among her early companions in the struggle to reconstruct America. During and after World War I, her leadership of the labor movement in Seattle and her support of the newborn Soviet Union solidified her ties to the Reds in progressive American politics. But Anna Louise was a remarkably solitary traveler, and for the next fifty years, as she journeyed repeatedly from the United States to Russia, China and Europe, her role in the American left became increasingly complex.

More constant in her life were her bonds with strong women. After the premature death of her brilliant and independent mother, she turned to Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, Lillian Wald and Julia Lathrop for friendship and guidance. Later it was women like Alexandra Kollontai,

Soong Ch'ing-ling and Eleanor Roosevelt to whom she was most drawn. Much of her best writing focuses on women, and her life vividly illuminates the sorrows and satisfactions that were inseparable from her attempt to free herself and others of the constraints imposed upon women.

Anna Louise Strong was my grandfather's older sister, and throughout my childhood and adolescence I was aware that my great-aunt was a famous person, about whom some of my other relatives preferred not to talk. I met her only once, in 1951, when I was eight years old and returning from the Far East with my mother, brother and sister. My parents were missionaries, and my father had remained behind for a few more months. Anna Louise, who was then in the United States, met our plane in Los Angeles. I remember a large, gruff woman who paid no attention to me, even though she had never seen me before. She wanted to speak with my father, and when she discovered that he was not there, she cried, "If I had known, I wouldn't have come," and marched away. She had no use for general impressions of China or social niceties; my father was worth the effort because she saw him as a particularly astute and politically trustworthy observer. The rest of us were merely family.

In 1960, when I was a freshman at Oberlin College, an instructor whose father had been one of her friends persuaded me to write to her. She was again in China. Her response astonished me. She wrote a four-page single-spaced letter that began: "It is incredible to me that I have a great-nephew old enough to be in Oberlin, but since you give the right passwords and mail through the secret channels, I shall take your word. In the momentary shock, I feel as old as the T'ang dynasty." She gave detailed answers to all my questions and invited me to "come again."

Two years later I rather shyly inquired about the possibilities of making her a visit; she was receptive, but for personal reasons I dropped the idea temporarily. In 1967, now a graduate student, I suggested it again. At that time, the great storm of the Cultural Revolution was breaking over China. Unbeknownst to me, Anna Louise wrote to friends of hers in the town where I was living as well as to my parents seeking confirmation that I would not embarrass her politically or personally. She received the appropriate assurances, but to her distress she was unable to obtain permission for me to come. Three years later she died.

The missed opportunity troubled me, and in 1972 I began research for an article on Anna Louise. It soon became apparent that no one essay could do her justice. A year and a half later I wrote to her executor in Peking, Frank Coe, that I wanted to come to China to learn more of her life there. He told me to wait for the political climate to change. In 1980,

my wife, Helene Keyssar, and I went to Peking for two months. The quantity and complexity of the material we discovered made clear that writing a book about Anna Louise would take both our best talents, and we agreed to become co-authors.

—Tracy B. Strong

Acknowledgments

Anna Louise Strong's published writings include over thirty books and innumerable articles. We estimate that for over sixty years she published an article a week. In addition, her letters and diaries from childhood on were saved. She was touched and awed to discover after her father's death that he had carefully collected every piece she published and every public reference to her he could find. She herself preserved not only copies of manuscripts, publications, and incoming letters but carbons of even the most trivial letters she sent out.

In her journalism, one finds an exemplary figure whose trail is better traced than is her character. A similar persona, still more model than substance, appears in her autobiography, *I Change Worlds*, which narrates the first forty-nine years of her life. Her early poetry, her one published play, *The King's Palace*, and her novel, *Wild River*, give a key to her emotions. Still another dimension is revealed in her unpublished manuscripts, which include interviews with such major historical figures as Mao Tse-tung, fragments of a second volume of autobiography, and what she called "explosions," her self-censored assaults on the governments she publicized. Finally, it is in her extensive and continuing correspondence with hundreds of people that one finds her private self most fully revealed.

Of the two major Anna Louise Strong collections, the one in the Suzallo Library at the University of Washington in Seattle contains most of her files until 1931, some materials from the thirties, forties and fifties, and an extensive file of her field notebooks and manuscripts from her sojourn in China in 1946 and 1947. The other main collection of her work is in the Peking Library in China and contains her papers from 1958 until her death. There are over thirty cartons in Seattle and twenty in China. There also are, or were, eight file drawers of material in the Soviet Union. We were unable to discover if these still exist, let alone gain access to them.

We also consulted other library archives, notably the Philip Jaffe archives at Emory University, the Social Welfare Archives at the University of Minnesota, the Peace Collection at Swarthmore College, the Raymond Robins archives at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the Roger Baldwin archives in the Seeley Mudd Library at Princeton University,

the American Board of Missions archives at Houghton Library in Harvard University, and the archives of her father and brother, both in the University of Washington. A number of her friends and relatives in this country gave us access to their private files.

The intelligence services of the United States spent an enormous amount of time keeping track of Anna Louise Strong. Her mail was regularly intercepted and copied, her telephones tapped, her movements followed. Through the Freedom of Information Act we obtained almost 6,000 pages from the FBI files, another 500 from other government agencies, 1,000 from the Federal Communications Commission, and about 100 from the Bureau of Investigation, the predecessor to the FBI. Despite the active presence of the government censor, these files allowed us to fill in many gaps.

Crucial to our endeavor were our interviews with those who knew her, worked with her, fought with her and loved her. In this country a loose network of older American radicals, many of them now forgotten, gave generously of their time and memories. We talked with over fifty individuals in the United States and corresponded with as many more. The second largest number of her friends is in the People's Republic of China. During our 1980 visit we interviewed all those still alive who had known her. Some of the more than thirty people with whom we spoke in China had known her as far back as her first visit to Canton in 1925. Sources for specific information and a list of all those interviewed appear at the end of this book. Our gratitude for this assistance is immeasurable.

Her surviving relatives provided information that only they could know. Without them, we might never have seen how much Anna Louise remained the child of her genealogy, despite her efforts to escape it.

To our children and friends who have patiently endured our absence and Anna Louise's looming presence, we offer our thanks beyond words. Carol Axel and Richard Numeroff took care of our children while we went to China. Jane Geddes made it possible for us to finish this book in less than a lifetime.

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We have been helped by the staffs of a number of excellent libraries: the Suzzallo Library at the University of Washington, the Peking Library,

the University of Minnesota Library, Emory University Library, the Seeley Mudd Library, and Swarthmore Library. We would like to thank Richard Berner and Karyl Wynn in Washington, Li Xun-da at the Peking Library, and Dorothy Green at the Sophia Smith Collection of Smith College for particular help.

Our trip in China would not have been the success it was without the ability and intelligence of Guo Ze Pei, Zhang Xue Ling, and the staff and officers of the Chinese People's Association for the Friendship with Foreign Nations.

In this country, Jeremy Paltiel provided important help and information about China and the U.S.S.R.; the staff of the political science and communications departments of the University of California at San Diego, especially Monica Paskvan, gave more than asked.

Most especially, Robbins Strong and Tracy Strong, Jr., provided readings and help without which we would never have been able to start or complete this work.

A biography of Anna Louise Strong cannot help but tempt its authors to analyze the history of the twentieth century. In writing this book, one of our most difficult tasks was to subordinate our own voices to that of Anna Louise. Our editor, Anne Freedgood, taught us to write Anna Louise's story. She also taught us more about the act of writing than we ever imagined we had to learn. We offer her both gratitude and admiration.

Anna Louise said of her 1935 autobiography that it had done more for her than it might ever do for any of her readers. The same might be said of this book for its authors.

Tracy B. Strong
Helene Keyssar
Encinitas, California

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RIGHT
IN HER
SOUL



Lao Tai-tai

There is one thing I fear—
 Not death, nor sharp disease,
 Nor loss of friends I hold most dear,
 Nor pain, nor want—not these.

But the life of which men say:
 "The world has given him bread;
 And what gives he to the world as pay
 For the crust on which he fed?"

I would pour out strength, and then
 When I have no strength to give,
 No use, no share in the lives of men
 Who toil, and fight, and live—

Then let the end come fast,
 Whatever my past success;
 That I may not cumber the ground at last,
 Nor linger in uselessness.

—Anna Louise Strong,
 "The Toiler's Fear," 1906

Hurrah for a ride as fast
 As my new sled will go,
 Hurrah for the end at last
 The plunge in the soft white snow.

—Anna Louise Strong,
 "Hurrah for Santa Claus," 1896

On Saturday, March 28, 1970, an eighty-four-year-old American woman lay in a private room in the north wing of the Fan Di hospital in central Peking. Except for a blue sweater, carefully folded on a small table near the patient's bed, there was no color in the room. The patient herself was as pale as the walls and sheets. Westerners who visited her were suddenly reminded that, for the Chinese, white was the color of death.

Only her firm, broad jaw seemed to defy her surroundings. She had

always hated dependency, and even here she reserved her strength to assert herself. Shortly after her admission to the hospital earlier that week, the doctors had inserted an intravenous tube in her arm to provide the nourishment and medication she was refusing at home. An hour later she had yanked it out, refusing to be "tied down." For over seventy years, she had come and gone as she pleased, but for some time now she had been afraid that her life might end in a room like this, surrounded mostly by people whose language she had never learned to speak. "At least I want to be able to ask for a glass of water," she had written the previous November to her great-nephew in the United States. So she had begun to make plans to return to the country that had always remained hers. In the hospital she spoke repeatedly of the coming journey, but the prospect of seeking permission from the U.S. Department of State was anathema to her; at least IV bottles and whispered words she did not understand were confrontable enemies.

And here she was well treated. In Peking, in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, she was surrounded by little luxuries and gestures of kindness such as she had not experienced since she was a child. She had returned to Peking at the age of seventy-two because, she had written to friends at the time, China stood at the forefront of world revolution. But she also knew how well the Chinese treated an old and honored friend. There were always thermoses of cold water and warm tea for her, a specially constructed bed to ease the pain in her legs and the right friend brought to her at the right moment to assuage her loneliness.

Here she was not only respected but admired. China was one of the few countries that still treated her as a special person; she did not need to remind the Chinese leaders that she had been first in more places and at more world-shaking events than anyone could remember. At home, in the United States, she would be simply Anna Louise Strong, a burdensome, often ill-tempered old lady, a dimly remembered radical. In Peking she had Chinese names, names of honor and respect. Long ago, in Chungking in 1940, a professor friend had given her a Chinese name to mark the occasion of her third visit to China. "Anna Louise Strong," he had said, "the giving of a name is very important in China; it reflects and shapes who you are. We will call you Shih Teh-lang, 'especially brilliant about history.'" She had been Shih Teh-lang for twenty-five years until during the 1960s a new appellation had gradually taken its place. In deference to her age, and always with a tone of affection, the Chinese now called her by the name once used for a mandarin's wife, Lao Tai-tai, the "honored old one."