

BOOKS

FROM THE LIFE OF THE GREAT PROLETARIAN LEADER

Memories of Lenin, NADEZHDA KRUPSKAYA. International Publishers, 1930.
\$1.50.

Reviewed by I. AMTER

Information about the life of the great leader of the Proletarian Revolution, Lenin, is always welcome. This man, who stands as the leader in this period of Revolution, and whose ability also as a statesman is admitted by capitalist writers, revealed methods of thought and action that should be studied by all revolutionary workers and working class leaders.

How different from the life of a Trotsky who sees the revolution, and consequently the working class, identified with *himself*; who sees in *himself* the compendium of the development and records of history; to whom the personal pronoun "I" is the first and last letter of the alphabet!

No one is better able to give us the intimate facts on the life of Lenin than Krupskaya, his wife and co-worker for a period of thirty years. These were the years of preparation of the workers and peasants and of carrying out the Revolution in the weakest link in the imperialist chain, Russia, in the establishment of the Communist International, and the spread of the Revolutionary movement throughout the world.

Lenin did not live to see and participate in the application of the Five-Year Plan of building up Socialism in the Soviet Union. He did not live to the day when the Socialist sector in industry and agriculture predominated. But his best pupils, led by Stalin, are carrying on under Lenin's banner against the "lefts" with Trotsky at their head and against the rights led by Bucharin. These opposition groups have not only failed to receive the support of the Communist Party and the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union, but in 1930 had to see (though they have not as a whole admitted) the Soviet industry and collective and State farms develop with such phenomenal speed that the whole capitalist world, which is in a crisis, gazes in astonishment, fear and hate. And yet the policy and general lines for the building up of Socialism were laid down by Lenin several years before.

Krupskaya's little book, which has been ably translated by Eric Verney, does not deal with the whole period up to Lenin's death, but only up to 1907. (It is announced that a second volume will follow.) Every student of Leninism and every sympathizer of the Soviet Union, and every one interested in the life of the great revolutionary leader, Lenin, should not fail to read this volume.

For the student of Communism and of revolutionary history, the book emphasizes some important factors and gives an insight into the life of Lenin. For instance, it has been stated that Lenin did not like or indulge in reading fiction. Krupskaya declares that this is not true, that he frequently read Russian classics and was very fond of Chernyshevsky. He was especially fond of Jack London's stories, and only two days before his death, had Krupskaya read to him London's *Love of Life*.

Some factors in the revolutionary movement Krupskaya's book emphasizes, on the basis of conversations and discussions which took place privately,

in committees and at conferences and conventions of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party—the Bolshevik part of which developed into the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Lenin (as also Krupskaya) listened closely to the demands and needs of the masses for the purpose of laying down a correct line of strategy; he had the conviction that the poor peasants must be united, in the struggle against capitalism, with the workers, as opposed to the menshevik's point of view that the workers and peasants are opposed to each other; Lenin had a firm faith in the masses and he insisted that they be in the leadership of the Party in predominant numbers; he emphasized the need not only of a centralized Party, but a Party of action and not of "eternal discussion" (something that the intellectuals always like to engage in.)

These ideas Lenin laid down early in his revolutionary work after having studied Marx and Engels well, and he continued to hammer away at them after the successful Revolution of 1917 and the establishment of the Communist International.

Thus both Lenin and Krupskaya in 1894 conducted a night and Sunday school in St. Petersburg and through conversations with their adult working-class students learned what their grievances were, what their methods were, the situation in the industries—exploitation, willingness to fight, trustworthiness of workers in the shops to build up groups of the Party in the shop, etc. Innumerable *contacts* were obtained in this manner, which became the center of revolutionary activity before and after the Revolution of 1905. Lenin would talk to the workers and to the peasants whom he met or who were delegated to see him when he was living in secrecy because of police persecution. From them he obtained the slogan "*All land to the peasants*"—a demand that the oppressed peasants instinctively put forward as a primary need.

From this, despite Kautsky's authority at that time in the revolutionary movement and his opinion that the revolutionary workers had no interest in peasant problems and should "remain neutral," Lenin and the Bolsheviks put forward the idea of a united struggle of workers and poor peasants against capitalism.

Lenin had implicit faith in the revolutionary will, devotion and ability of the masses. "In combatting the conception of the old revolutionaries," says Krupskaya, "he (Lenin) had learnt to counterpose the heroism of individual militants by the *power and heroism of class struggles*." Or again, "The workers have a class instinct," said Lenin, "and even with little political experience they quite quickly become steadfast Social-democrats (now Communists. I. A.) *I would very much like to see eight workers on our committees for every two intellectuals.*" (Emphasis mine. I. A.)

The necessity of a centralized Party became clear when the Bund (organization of Jewish revolutionary workers) refused to join the Party but was willing to cooperate in revolutionary actions. The bane of a party composed of national groups was long felt by the Communist Party of the United States, this obstacle to real centralization and uniform work at last being removed by the Comintern.

Lenin's views on other matters are interesting and important. Being forced for a time to print their newspapers and pamphlets abroad, because of persecution, the Russian revolutionists did not fail to take advantage of every situation that would enable them to print them in Russia. Sometimes these papers would "last" not more than one or two editions; when suppressed, a paper bearing a different name immediately appeared. All hindrances had

to be overcome for the sake of the Revolution! When the situation changed and when work was possible, every kind of organization was formed; and yet even in the days of the worst oppression the Communists found methods of doing open work, just as they are doing today in countries with fascist and reactionary governments.

Lenin's opinions on other questions might well be heeded by revolutionists today.

Thus on *simplicity*, Lenin believed that "*Communism must be made accessible and comprehensible to the masses as their own cause*. Popular speeches and popular literature should have a *concrete* object, one which *urges to definite action*. The political idea developed in a popular speech should be succinct and clear in its meaning. *No vulgarization, oversimplification, or departure from objectivity is permissible*. The exposition should be planned in a lucid manner, should help the listener or reader himself to draw the conclusions, and only sum up and formulate these conclusions." Or again, "There exists among the broad masses a haze of misunderstandings, a complete lack of comprehension of our position. We must therefore speak as popularly as possible. . . . *In speaking before the masses, we must provide concrete replies*." (Emphasis mine. I. A.)

On accuracy: "*Lenin never cited facts from memory, approximately, but always gave them with the greatest accuracy*. He looked through piles of material, but whatever he wanted to remember he wrote down in his notebooks. . . . He did not foist anything on the workers, but proved his con-
of the universal Communist army." (Emphasis is mine. I. A.)

On authorities: "The working class leading a difficult and stubborn world-wide fight for complete emancipation, needs authorities, but it stands to reason, only in the sense that *every young worker needs the experience of the old fighters* against oppression and exploitation. *He needs the experience of those who have been through manifold strikes, who have participated in the ranks of the Revolution, who have become learned in revolutionary traditions and a wide political vision*. The authority of the world wide proletarian struggles is needed by us in order to elucidate the program and tactics of our Party. Our authority is the authority of the many-sided struggle in the ranks of the universal Communist Army." (Emphasis is mine.—I. A.)

It is interesting to note what Lenin said about Trotsky. When Trotsky first went to London to meet Lenin in the latter part of 1902, Lenin took quite a fancy to him and he was considered Lenin's pupil. He was later dubbed "Lenin's cudgel" and Krupskaya says, "Lenin thought he would never waver." However, when in September 1905, Lenin wrote to a comrade who informed him that they were printing a Trotsky leaflet, he said: "They are printing Trotsky's leaflets . . . dear me . . . there's nothing wrong in that, *provided the leaflets are tolerable and have been corrected!*" This is characteristic of the lack of confidence that Lenin had in Trotsky's political judgment as far back as 1905.

Lenin's opinion of Father Gapon, who led the workers to massacre before the Tsar's palace in December, 1905: Gapon made a special trip to Geneva to consult Lenin. According to Krupskaya, Lenin considered Gapon "a living part of the Revolution that was sweeping Russia." He was closely bound up with the working masses who devotedly believed in him. On February 8, Lenin wrote in "Vperiod," the revolutionary paper: "We hope George Gapon, who has experienced and felt so profoundly the transition from the opinions of a politically unconscious people to revolutionary views, will succeed in

working to obtain the clarity of revolutionary outlook necessary for a political leader." Although brought up to be a priest, Gapon was moved by the revolutionary movement. Vereshchagin, the artist, tried to persuade him to give up the priesthood, but he did not want to offend his father. "He did not know how to learn," says Krupskaya. "After he returned to Russia he slid into the abyss."

Finally Lenin's attitude on Party Conventions, at all of which he took a leading part! In reply to a comrade who deplored the "fierce fighting," this agitation one against the other, these sharp polemics, this uncomradely attitude, he replied: "What a fine thing our Party Congress is. *Opportunity for open fighting. Opinions expressed. Tendencies revealed. Groups defined. Hands raised. A decision taken. A stage passed through. Forward!* That's what I like! That's life! It is something different from the *endless, wearying intellectual discussions, which finish not because people have solved the problem, but simply because they have tired of talking.*" (Emphasis mine. I. A.)

This was characteristic of the great Bolshevik, Vladimir Ilyich known all over the world as Lenin. Thus acts a Bolshevik—thus acts the revolutionary Bolshevik (Communist) Party.