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Lenin: Best Hated and Best Loved

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I CELEBRATED my birthday by visiting Lenin, Prime Minister of the first Soviet Republic of Russia. I am setting down my personal impressions of this man—the best hated and the best loved in the world—because personality has counted for such an infinite amount in the revolution. I shall send later a verbatim account of the opinions Lenin expressed to me on industrial and political matters.

I have met statesmen of all countries, and I am well acquainted with those who rule over our own land. There is not one of them who can surpass in ability and knowledge, in honesty of purpose and in courage, the man who to-day is the inspirer and guide of the Russian people.

We had never met before, yet from the first moment we were on terms of mutual trust and confidence. He spoke quite fully and without reserve on questions of private and public policy. Clearly he had nothing to hide.

He has nothing of the ways or of the manners of ordinary statesmen, and does not try to assume them. He lives in the Kremlin in one of the large buildings, formerly courts of justice, I believe, with which that place abounds: but his own surroundings are perfectly simple and businesslike. There are no men servants or what are termed "menials," only a few clerks and typists carrying on the work of his department.

I should say that he works every minute of his waking hours. Until the telephones were switched off he was not free from calls for more than two or three minutes.

He dresses as simply as an artisan. Of course, I looked him over eagerly for a sight of those diamonds so much talked about in the capitalist press, but, alas, I saw none! Indeed, I have not seen a diamond during my stay in Moscow.

Portraits which I have seen of Lenin give no adequate picture of the expression of his face.

He is about 50 years old, of medium height, and carries himself with a slight stoop. He has fine eyes, which look you straight in the face, sometimes with a whimsical expression, as if he were trying to discover if anything unexpressed lay behind your words. They have, too, an expression of careful kindness; and you put him down as a man who must love children.

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LENIN

But his outstanding feature—so outstanding that it must come into the physical catalogue—is his iron will and determination. He has a profound contempt for all of us who would compromise, and has use only for those who are willing to dare all for the cause.

He believes that the quickest way to effect the change is for all who want International Socialism to say so, and act so, all the time, irrespective of all personal considerations. He practices what he preaches. He appeared to me like a man who would go as calmly to his death as to a meeting of his Cabinet. But for all this calmness, I am sure that he can be very angry when occasion demands.

Captain Sadoul, the courageous Frenchman under sentence of death in his own land because of his fearless exposure of Allied treachery in dealing with Soviet Russia, said to me the other day: "The Communists of Russia are to the Socialist movement what the Society of Jesus was to the Church of Rome—that is, in the spirit and determination with which the Communists are willing to be sacrificed for the cause they love so well."

And, after all, it is the spirit in which men do things that really matters. In everything that makes a true leader Lenin is to the Socialist movement what St. Ignatius Loyola was to the Society of Jesus.

His own absorbing aim in life is to rescue the workers of the world from the thralldom of wage-slavery and capitalism, and to establish the International. He is the embodiment of the famous saying: "The world is my country, all mankind my brethren, to do good my religion."

To think of Lenin as a person loving bloodshed is laughable.

This two and a half years of strife and struggle has been for the leaders of the revolution a period of stress and strain which has told on them all, especially on Lenin, who, in addition to everything else, still carries in his body two bullets of his would-be assassin. In spite of this; he was as full of vigor and cheeriness as a boy; he made jokes and laughed at them as if without a care.

We talked about the movement in England; we discussed the dictatorship of the proletariat and parliaments, our leaders and the present and future struggle here, and in most things were in agreement.

We talked of atrocities only very little. The longer I am here the more I feel that it is an insult to those whose guest I am to continue to talk to them about horrors for which they are no more guilty or responsible than I am.

The other day I met a leading priest who could speak English fluently. We were alone, and could, of course, talk freely. He told me that Lenin and his colleagues did everything in their power to preserve order, and in no way could be held responsible for any outrages that may have been committed. He also expressed himself in high terms of appreciation of Lenin.

Lenin, as I have said, is the best hated and at the same time the best loved man in the world. I know now and understand how it is that the Rus-

LENIN

sian workers have held on to their revolution through war, pestilence and famine. They are blessed with great leaders who have proved that power does not spoil them, who do not desire to follow the ways, customs and mode of living of the classes they have dispossessed, who, selected to serve, remain servants of the people. Together they have shared the trials and sufferings of the common people.

The leader of them all is this man Lenin, with his strongly marked Russian peasant face, who with the indomitable courage characteristic of his people in their age-long struggle for bread, is the man who in dark days and bright inspires them all.

I write thus of him, not because we are agreed on all things—on some fundamental things we do not agree—but because I think I know a good man when I see one, and can appreciate deeds as well as words.

Lenin has proved himself a great impersonal soldier and leader in the one cause which for me is worth living, striving and dying for—the establishment of the true international by the replacement of capitalism by socialism.

In the old days the Czarist despots were known as “little fathers of the Russian people.” To-day Lenin is to Russia symbolic of a new spirit, not of despotism but of freedom. Men and women love him, and if need be would die for him, not because he is their ruler (he is not a ruler in any sense of the word), but because he is their comrade, and their mouthpiece, the champion, of social and economic freedom, and because, in the struggle through which Russia is passing, he has given himself body and soul and spirit to their service, without desire or hope of personal reward or power.

When parting, he asked me to convey his cordial good wishes to all comrades and friends of the movement in England, and to tell them of his confident hope that ere long the International of the Workers will be established throughout the world.