

Affairs of State and Revolution

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN: Leader of Bolshevik Revolution
CECILIA BOBROVSKAYA: An underground revolutionary
NADEZHDA KRUPSKAYA: Lenin's wife
MAKAR: Another revolutionary

Introduction:

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world, the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

-George Bernard Shaw (267)

When I first began this project, I wished to write a play about my childhood in a small coal-mining town in western Pennsylvania. I wanted to depict, on stage, the deep feelings of frustration and powerlessness I experienced in my quest to effect meaningful change. However, as I began my research I soon discovered that this topic was not one people tended to write articles about. A change of topic was in order. As Shaw's quotation suggests, my frustration was universal, and so my research began to follow a new path.

In 1917, a Russian revolutionary group called the Bolsheviks rebelled against the tsar in an attempt to install a communist society. They envisioned a world free of inequality and oppression, and although this goal may not have been realized, their aspirations were quite noble. I began to read the memoirs

and writings of prominent figures of the time, at which point certain observations piqued my interest.

When women and men are put together, biology increases the odds that conflicts will arise. This truth became clear to me as I was reading the memoir of a woman in Bolshevik Russia by the name of Cecilia Bobrovskaya. Though her book, *Twenty Years In Underground Russia: Memoirs of a Rank and File Bolshevik*, focuses on underground revolutionaries' work, it became intriguing for other reasons as well.

Bobrovskaya describes a period in the early 1900s when she was exiled to Geneva. During that time, she had the opportunity to become personally acquainted with Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks. One evening she was so absorbed in listening to him speak that she lost track of the time and missed her tram. Lenin then walked her home, and on their way she shared with him her doubts and fears. He reassured her, and she writes that the words he spoke to her that night were ones she remembered for the rest of her life and recalled whenever she became discouraged.

I got the impression from the way in which she described these events that there was something more going on between Bobrovskaya and Lenin. Bobrovskaya's writing style is matter-of-fact and to the point. But whenever she describes Lenin, her language shifts, and it becomes apparent that she was very much in awe of him and regarded him with more passion than anything else about which she wrote. This became the spark for my play, in which I allude to the existence of an affair between them.

The idea of Lenin having an affair is not so far-fetched. In fact, it is widely accepted that Lenin had an affair with a French woman named Inessa Armand, as Clements mentions (114). She, too, was a Bolshevik revolutionary, and was actively involved in the movement. Armand was also close friends with Lenin and his wife Krupskaya. They were colleagues, and an extramarital relationship did develop. Clements evidences this by citing a letter from Inessa to Lenin in which she mentions her love for him and how much she misses him. Their relationship is unmistakable when she writes, "I could manage now without kisses if I could only see you; to talk with you sometimes would be a joy" (112).

Although the Bolsheviks were very liberal in their notions of marriage and love, her husband's infidelity must have been somewhat of a blow to Krupskaya. I included her in the play for two reasons. First, Bobrovskaya recounts her presence the night Lenin walked her home, and second, because it provides another source of tension in the play, although only implicitly. But I also felt that I did not know enough about Krupskaya to effectively judge her reactions or her character. At this point I knew her as a revolutionary, not a person, and so it was necessary to find out more.

To get an even better idea of the Lenin/Krupskaya relationship, I attempted to find out as much as I could about it by reading Lenin's letters. Although apparently Lenin and Krupskaya had worked together since 1893 in St. Petersburg, according to a timeline found in the book *The Letters of Lenin*, he did not mention her in any of the surviving letters until 1898, which is the year in which they were married. During this time, both Lenin and Krupskaya were under arrest. Lenin was sentenced to Siberian exile, whereas Krupskaya's sentence was

somewhat more harsh. The two agreed to marry, and while Krupskaya's sentence was not reduced in duration, she was at least allowed to live in Siberia with Lenin (50). This indeed makes matters rather interesting. Krupskaya's take on the situation? "I was banished to the Ufa Gubernia for three years, but obtained a transfer to the village of Shushenskoye in the Minusinsk Uyezd, where Vladimir Ilyich lived, by describing myself as his fiancée" (Krupskaya, Part 1).

From Clements, I read that Krupskaya and Lenin were intellectual partners. They worked very closely together in developing theories and leading the revolution. Clements writes,

Service to her husband was also service to the cause of liberating Russia, but Krupskaya did not think of herself primarily as a woman doing her wifely duty. Rather, she saw herself as a revolutionary who was married to the man best qualified by the penetrating power of his intellect and the purity of his resolve to play a leading role in finding the way to revolution. (110)

Krupskaya, of course, would never do anything to compromise the success of the revolution, to which she had dedicated her life. My own speculations, combined with the fact that the Bolsheviks believed in making their personal lives one with the goal of the revolution, led me to believe that Krupskaya would likely have been very careful with regards to confronting her husband about his affairs. She would likely have instinctively known about them, but at the same time been reluctant to cause any tension that could undermine the cause of the revolution as a whole.

At this point, the story of my play began to come together. Starting with Bobrovskaya's memoir, I decided that the action would be set in Geneva where Lenin and Cecilia were exiled. The scene would have taken place sometime after the failed uprising of 1905. The uprising's failure provided the trigger for Cecilia's doubts, as it was demoralizing to many of the Bolsheviks of the time.

Cecilia, for me, epitomizes the typical Bolshevik woman. The female Bolsheviks came from a variety of social strata, but they did share several traits. Among them were a firm commitment to their cause, and what Clements describes as "hardness," which she claims to be their defining characteristic. Clements describes a Bolshevik woman as being "unsentimental, determined, efficient, and industrious...utterly dedicated to her work and ruthless toward opponents...coldly rational and unsentimental" (60). They needed to have these traits to survive life in the revolutionary underground.

Lenin is, of course, one of the most well-known figures of the Bolshevik revolution and necessitates very little explanation. I call him "Ilyich" in my play, because this is how his inner circle tended to refer to him. Also it seemed to make him more personable. Ilyich was incredibly passionate about the revolution and made it one with his personal life. This is what prompted me to use the revolution to serve as innuendo between he and Cecilia.

I also chose to include Makar in the opening scene for dialogue purposes. Makar was a revolutionary Cecilia briefly mentioned in her memoir. All she wrote of him was that "[his] love for Lenin bordered on hero worship" (Bobrovskaya Ch 6). However, the Makar in my play is used for a different purpose, that being to argue politics with Lenin. Lenin was first and foremost a brilliant theorist, so I

portray him as arguing the points he made in his essay "The State and Revolution." In it, he describes the role of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," which is one of the most controversial and misunderstood Marxist phrases. This is because what he speaks of is not a dictatorship of one person over another, but rather the giving of power back to the working class (349). However, its ambiguity makes a good starting point for an argument, as well as allowing Makar to poke fun at Lenin for being so overly intelligent.

The rest of the play can speak for itself. It has gone through some incredible changes from where it originally started, evolving from Western Pennsylvania, to the Bolshevik Revolution, to where it currently stands: a tale of Lenin's love life. Not even Bolshevik leaders are exempt from life's dramas, it would seem.

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SCENE I

The scene is set in the early 1900s in Lenin's quarters in Geneva. A small group is gathered in the kitchen to listen to Lenin speak. Among them are Cecilia, an underground revolutionary; Makar, another revolutionary; and Krupskaya, Lenin's wife.

ILYICH: It therefore follows that a dictatorship of the proletariat must necessarily carry with it not only changes in the form and institutions of democracy, speaking in general terms, but specifically such a change as would secure an extension such as has never been seen in the history of the world of the actual use of democratism by the toiling classes.

CECILIA: Ilyich, that was brilliant.

MAKAR: What the hell did he just say?

ILYICH: I thought I made it quite clear.

MAKAR: Really now. Question, as to how one will know when the dictatorship of the proletariat has fulfilled its useful purpose? When will we be ready to progress to the higher stage of communism? *(Mild sarcasm)* Perhaps you could give us, um, a timeline?

ILYICH: No, no. For God's sake!

MAKAR: He's an atheist, and yet he swears by God.

ILYICH: And he's acting like a bloody Menshevik, devil take it! Now, back to my point. Try to think of it this way. The dictatorship of the proletariat is merely a stage to achieve communism, a part of a progression. It is, from its very outset, a dying government. During this time, all members of society will begin to administer the state themselves, and as society begins to fulfill these roles on its own, the state will wither away and vanish.

MAKAR: So he's a bloody anarchist, that's what he is.

ILYICH: No, no, no. *(Laughs)* You see, I believe in using the state to destroy the state.

CECILIA: Ah, Ilyich...

KRUPSKAYA: Would anyone like some more tea? Or perhaps some vodka?

CECILIA: *(Briefly pauses, glances at the door)* What time is it?

KRUPSKAYA: Why, it's after one already.

CECILIA: Well then. It would appear that I've missed the last tram.

KRUPSKAYA: You shouldn't walk home this late. It's rather dangerous for a woman to be alone at night in the city. This is Geneva, not Russia, remember.

ILYICH: Don't fret, Cecilia. I'll walk you home. Besides, I could use a bit of fresh air myself.

CECILIA: Thank you. *(Looks at Krupskaya)* And thank you for the hospitality as well. This evening was enjoyable.

KRUPSKAYA: *(Sighs, glares at Ilyich)* Be careful, Ilyich. You're of vital importance to the revolution too you know... We don't want to be losing you.

(They exit)

SCENE II

Now Cecilia and Ilyich converse as they walk. There are houses, but the city street is silent. Ilyich is reserved, powerful, and somewhat flirtatious.

CECILIA: *(Shyly)* You know, lately I've been thinking...

ILYICH: Something's been bothering you. I can tell.

CECILIA: Well, we're working towards the goal of a society free of oppression and exploitation, and this goal is of utmost importance to me, as you know. Sometimes I get discouraged though...

ILYICH: You needn't worry so much. We shall triumph. Our movement has power, and will change the world.

- CECILIA: But Ilyich, our latest uprising has just failed. Everyone's scattered, demoralized. How do we pick up and start again, from nothing? (*Looks at Ilyich*) How does one know that one is starting something that will last?
- ILYICH: Because we don't have nothing. Realize that the roots of a revolution lie in the working class itself. A revolution must include the masses, all of the workers and the peasants. That's what gives our movement such power. We aren't communists for communism's sake. No, we are a movement that is simply the revolutionary working class. The revolution isn't just a bunch of theories on papers (*Looks at Cecilia*) It is us.
- CECILIA: (*Nods*) Professional revolutionaries. But sometimes...I just don't know, I'm so tired... it seems like the others are so gifted, so well-spoken, so intelligent. Even the factory workers, they seem, pardon if I sound stupid saying this, but they almost have a proletarian instinct. (*Pauses, glances at Ilyich meaningfully*) But look at me. I don't have any of these things, I'm not talented, I'm not what the model, perhaps, of a revolutionary should be. Maybe I'm not suited to this life.
- (Cecilia and Ilyich walk past Cecilia's house. They turn around, and keep walking)*
- ILYICH: Do not fear. You have what it takes.
- CECILIA: Do I?
- ILYICH: You're perfect. Don't doubt yourself so much. You have courage. You have dedication. You're not afraid to do what it takes.
- CECILIA: What does it take? Sometimes I wonder exactly what is going on inside your head.
- ILYICH: Everyone does.
- CECILIA: I am a revolutionary. I'm not afraid to take some risks. You should be as well. Now, is there anyway I could perhaps find out what you are really thinking?
- ILYICH: This is what I see when I think of a professional revolutionary. I see someone whose life is one with the revolution. One who is dedicated to the cause of liberating the proletariat.

- CECILIA: *(Laughs)* Ooh Ilyich!
- ILYICH: *(Passionately, mixing politics, philosophy, and romance)* A revolution doesn't only consist only of leaders, Cecilia. A revolution is made by the rank and file workers. People like yourself are indispensable to this movement. People like yourself lay the foundations of the revolution, brick by brick. Without this, our revolution would be nothing.
- CECILIA: I do what I can... Perhaps I could find some way to do even more.
- ILYICH: Social change is shaped by those who don't just think about acting, but those who take the initiative to actually do it.
- CECILIA: And so we shall.
- ILYICH: The revolution is my passion, as you can tell. And we will do this. We will change the world.
- CECILIA: Thank you, Ilyich. You know, you're the first person I've been so open with. It helps, to be able to talk. To realize that one is not alone, that one is part of something greater. That it is not hopeless.
- ILYICH: One must have a little more confidence in one's abilities. That is not at all bad for the work, not bad at all.
- (Brief pause, walking continues. Ilyich glances at Cecilia)*
- ILYICH: *(Slyly, and laughs)* You know, we really must put an end to this escorting business. Although it really is my own fault, for becoming so absorbed in conversation. How about this time I take you home for real. Sorry to keep you so long. Unless, of course, you'd rather keep walking?
- CECILIA: *(Laughs)* Well, I suppose I probably should go home... I am rather enjoying this though. Shall we take the long way, perhaps?
- ILYICH: Indeed, that can be done.
- (They walk off stage, laughing)*

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