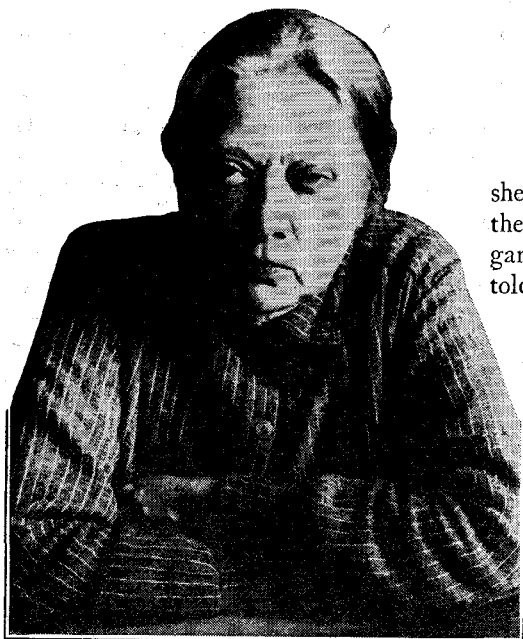


## ►► Meet Mrs. Lenin ◀◀

By HILDA AGELOFF



Keystone

### THE WIDOW LENIN

Otherwise "Tavarish" Nadjesda Konstantinovna Krupsgaya

HER fellow Muscovites told me that she was a very homely woman. They remember her as she looked in her active days, now behind her. But age, that despoiler of beauty, has reversed the order of things and created a subtle transformation in the face of Madame Nadjesda Konstantinovna Krupsgaya, the widow of Lenin. The once heavy dark hair is now a soft gray and the large features have also softened. Those bulging eyes that her early pictures reveal with their troubled, fierce stare are now subdued. The thick lips form so tender a smile that they have lost their youthful firmness.

For a month I had been trying to see her. She was in the Crimea, I was told, trying to recover her lost health, losing her fight with age. "In what town can I find her?" I asked. A knowing smile answered me. "Sorry, I couldn't tell you if I did know." "What do you wish to speak to her about?" asked the officials of the *Narcompross* (Commissariat of Public Education) of which Madame Krupsgaya is a member. I explained. They smiled a little contemptuously and told me with typically brutal candor, "We can discuss the problem better than she. Her position in the Commissariat is more honorary than active."

Every one tried to discourage me. What is this American curiosity in the private lives of great personages? What is the difference whether Stalin likes boiled cabbage or not? Furthermore, she had not given an interview in years. A few months before she had refused one with an English correspondent. Even the Russian newspapers rarely had an audience. But she agreed to see me when

she returned because of my interest in the Communist nurseries and kindergartens. Her associates at *Narcompross* told her of my intensive work among them. However, I should have to wait. There were to be several all-day Party conferences. Could I see her at home in the evening? I inquired. No, our meeting must take place at her office.

I took an interpreter along because Madame Krupsgaya has forgotten her speaking English. Though the language was self-taught, there was a time when she knew it well enough to translate the Webbs with her husband. Only one admonition was given me before going in to see her.

"Don't call her Madame. She is 'Tavarish' like every one else in the U.S.S.R."

*Tavarish* Krupsgaya greeted me graciously, and for a moment I was at a loss to hide my bewilderment. Then I discovered that the photographs upon which I had built my idea of Krupsgaya had misguided me. The passionate revolutionary expression has changed to one of complacency. The look of shrewdness has faded into a pair of rather vague-looking eyes, revealing a sweet, motherly soul.

She wore a brown serge dress of monastic simplicity that contrasted strangely with the tall velvet chairs, the elaborate Czarist desk. I wanted to ask her some personal questions, but knowing the severity of the Communist temperament would not permit it, I confined my questions to the topic that brought me. Did she think the Russian parents as a whole ready to accept communal school homes for their children? The picture she painted was over-rosy.

"IF ONLY we had sufficient material to build these communal schools and the teachers with which to staff them, parents would willingly bring their children. The existing day nurseries and kindergartens have proved the wisdom of the Communist doctrine with regard to children."

I wanted her to discuss the present-day problems regarding this policy, but all I received was a host of trivial experiences that she had collected during her continuous travels throughout the U.S.S.R., inspecting the schools. Decidedly she is not a part of the present tempo in Russia, where the sense of the

struggle still before them is very acute. She talked as if she believed that Communism in its entirety was established throughout the country, and that all that was required for complete harmony was the money with which to build schools. She shied away gently from any questioning that sought to pin her down to a direct answer. Confronted with the tremendous problem of destroying family life as we know it here and creating a communal one, she answered that it was practically accomplished already.

AS SHE continued talking, I thought, "Her grasp on present-day problems is slipping." She is a gentle soul to whom the establishment of the Communist régime—the result of over thirty years' untiring devotion to a single cause—was the completion of her life's aim. For a time after the revolution she was very active in educational affairs, plunging deep into the problem of illiteracy, building a new system from her experiences as teacher among the workers when she was a young girl in St. Petersburg. But lately there has come a slackening up. Her life has been so completely overshadowed by her illustrious husband that without him her career seems to have faded into nothingness. A host of tender memories confuse and cloud the horizon.

Perhaps it is not quite accurate to say that her personality was completely submerged into Lenin's. She was rather a disciple of his. A revolutionary long before she met her husband, it is more correct to say that as an ardent Communist she felt her greatest contribution to her country lay in the spreading of his ideas. She helped Russia by being useful to her husband in little things, removing his worries wherever possible to free him for his great work. She even cooked for him, because Lenin thrived best on home cooking. She tells of a time in Munich when they lived, slept and ate in one room. She was preparing their meal.

"I tried to make as little noise as possible as Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin] was then beginning to write 'What is to be Done.' When he was writing I never spoke to him about anything." She has also confided that "even now I have not outlived this habit of mentally formulating my impressions for Ilyich," and at his funeral she summed up her credo when she said, "Comrades—working-

men and workingwomen; comrades—peasants and peasant women; workers of the world, rally your ranks and march forward under the banner of Lenin, under the banner of Communism!”

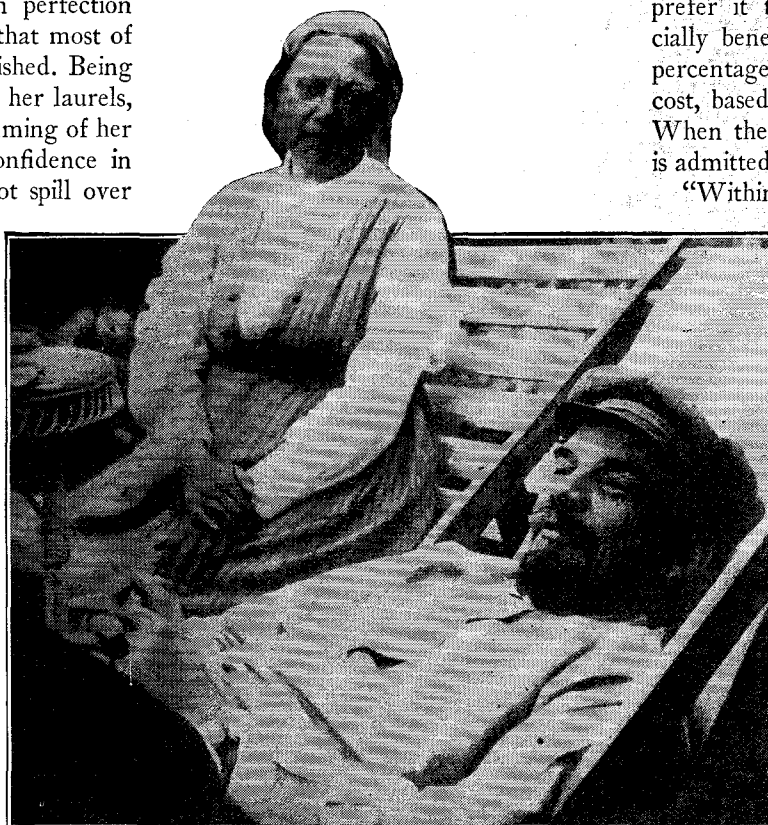
In those days she was actively engaged in the work of political education, but from our recent conversation I was led to believe that the problem of political ignorance is practically solved. Though the schools are still very inadequate and very few Soviets will claim perfection for them, she seems to feel that most of the work is already accomplished. Being old and ill, she is resting on her laurels, perhaps rationalizing the dimming of her activities by an over-rosy confidence in the present. Her talk did not spill over with worries about their gigantic program as does the conversation of other educational authorities. Her brows are not knitted with worry, only with age. One feels love and tenderness for all humanity radiate from her as from a religious visionary, to draw a curious and unwelcome simile. She told me of a trip she had made recently to a *Kolchus* (collective farm).

“The mothers were so happy about the day nursery. They said that for the first time they could work in the fields with their minds at rest about their children. They would just as gladly welcome a day and night commune home for them if we had the means to build them. Only the wealthier mothers prefer to keep their children at home.”

Did that not indicate that parents put their children into nurseries because of economic necessity rather than by preference, I wanted to know?—but I received no answer. Instead, *Tavarish* Krupsgaya described a meeting of women factory workers which she had recently attended.

“The women complained that not enough was being done to provide nurseries for their children. They decided at this meeting that they would interest themselves in the problem and agitate for more nurseries and kindergartens for their children. Russia’s parents have learned to recognize the advantages they offer. Just after the Revolution the population protested strongly against the establishment of even day nurseries. I happened to be on a boat along the Volga

at the time and heard every one crying out against Communist schools. They seemed to fear that the Communists would invade their homes and tear their children from them. Stronger than any other antagonism towards the new régime was the thought that their offspring would have to grow up in communal homes and be educated in Communist schools. So you see what remarkable progress we have made. Now



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LENIN AND MRS. LENIN  
*In the Crimea shortly before his death*

mothers would gladly bring their children to communal homes, if we had them. We cannot afford to build them just yet. We do not even have sufficient accommodations for the children of workers in our day nurseries.

“THIS change in the attitude of the parents was brought about by the existing day nurseries and kindergartens. They have shown the mother what great opportunities for self-advancement await her in the world outside her home, what a joyous task is hers in the bettering of society. Furthermore, her children are happier in the company of other children than they are at home with their parents. In the nursery, kindergarten or school the child finds himself in a world of equals, engaged in all sorts of fascinating tasks which make the parental home dull by comparison. In one kindergarten I visited a mother came up to me and said, ‘My son refuses to stay

home. He cares only for the kindergarten. I shall speak to Lenin about it.’

“Then, too, the mother knows that her child is better housed in the nursery than at home. The sanitary facilities there are better. Nurses and doctors watch the child’s health. The food is also richer than that purchased on the outside. The child derives so many benefits from the nursery or kindergarten that its parents have no alternative but to prefer it to the home. Workers especially benefit, as they pay only a small percentage of the actual maintenance cost, based on the income of the family. When the earnings are small, the child is admitted free of charge.

“Within the next five or seven years we shall have communal school homes where the children will live permanently. Surely the end of the next Five-Year plan will see the establishment of these commune homes. It is only a matter of putting up the buildings and training the personnel. Parents will themselves help in this work.

“Our teachers are very gentle with their pupils. Punishment is prohibited. Yet the discipline in the schools is perfect. I visited a kindergarten recently, my entrance being quite unnoticed by the older children busily engaged on an interesting project. But when I came among the tiniest of the tots, also

busy with some tasks, they cried, ‘Oh, tante, you are indoors and you have your coat on.’

“The stronger children must pull the weaker ones to their own level. Also they must help ‘liquidate’ illiteracy wherever they find it. For that purpose also we have recently inaugurated compulsory education—children from the age of seven must go to school, in the cities for eight years, and in the country for four years. The shortage of school buildings necessitates three shifts of pupils during the day.”

While we were conversing Alexandre Ustinovitch Zelenko came in. Comrade Zelenko, like Krupsgaya, was one of the original Revolutionaries and like her spent his early life outside of Russia. He became interested in progressive education while living at Hull House in Chicago many years ago, and though he is an architect by profession he has been

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