

SOVIET LIFE

SONG OF ARMENIA

AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN
IN THE SOVIET UNION

April 1972 • 50 cents



RECEIVED

MAY 3
1972

SOVIET LIFE

The magazine SOVIET LIFE is published by reciprocal agreement between the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union. The agreement

provides for the publication and circulation of the magazine SOVIET LIFE in the United States and the magazine AMERICA in the Soviet Union.

EDITOR'S NOTES

THERE ARE quite a number of letters sent to the editorial office of SOVIET LIFE by American readers that are thought-provoking.

Several of them have raised a question that is of universal interest these days—the vast gulf between the educated and the uneducated. The point is not primarily a matter of income. There are many blue-collar workers who earn as much or more than white-collar workers. What seems to be involved is an attitude of mind.

Some people think it's silly for a worker to cultivate intellectual traits, read real literature or listen to classical music.

"Will this happen in Soviet society?" the letters ask. The implication is that as a country's living standards go up and the rank-and-file worker gets all his material needs satisfied, he is lulled by the good things of life and loses any interest he may have had in cultural things.

In spite of our rising standard of living, this is not happening in the Soviet Union. Our Revolution was not made just to get an extra piece of bread. We are not building socialism simply to have more cars and TV sets. We do not look at rising living standards from the purely consumer point of view. Prosperity per se is not the goal of our society. It is only an indispensable condition for the individual's social progress and rounded development. This is the view of the Communist Party, this is the course steered by the Soviet Government in its everyday activity, and this is also the opinion of millions of rank-and-file citizens. That is why the growth of living and cultural standards has been a parallel process in our country. And the nearer we get to communism, the more opportunities we have for education and cultural advancement. It means that we expect from the future not the intellectual cleavage one reader refers to, but the intellectual unity of society—without uniformity or universal leveling, of course.

Naturally, not all Soviet people have the same cultural standards. There are people with high cultural requirements, and there are some (though they seem to be in the minority) whose leisure time activity does not go beyond TV watching. But it would be wrong to attribute this difference to a difference in educational levels. Our conception of a person doing manual work—what Americans call "the blue-collar worker"—has undergone an essential change. Today's

SOVIET PEOPLE

- 6 SONG OF ARMENIA
by Gevorg Emin
- 19 ANNIVERSARY OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH CPSU CONGRESS
by Anatoli Shishkov
- 20 HE ALWAYS TAKES THE LEAD
by Alexander Novikov
- 29 ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI
by Georgii Petrov
- 32 YOUNG PIONEERS
- 34 TAGANROG: VISIT TO AN AVERAGE CITY
by Alexander Levikov

ECONOMY AND SCIENCE

- 18 CMEA AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CONTACTS
by Alexander Alexeyev
- 40 THE NINTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN: THE UNION AND ITS REPUBLICS
by Victor Pavlenko
- 56 SIBERIAN OIL: DISCOVERY OF THE CENTURY
by Boris Shcherbina

LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

- 42 SILVER TRANSFORMED
- 44 THEATER FOR CHILDREN
by Yvetta Knyazeva
- 51 ARMENIA'S ARTISTS

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

- 48 DOING BUSINESS WITH THE USSR
by Maya Gordeyeva
- 50 MAURICE STANS—OUR GUEST
by Igor Lobanov
- 62 U.S. BLACK DELEGATION IN THE SOVIET UNION

MISCELLANEOUS

- 2 PEOPLE AND EVENTS
- 4 EDITOR'S NOTES
- 16 AROUND THE COUNTRY
- 28 QUERIES FROM READERS
- 55 NEXT ISSUE

Cover III CHILDREN'S CORNER



Front Cover: Georgetta Saksyan, a young Armenian. For story of Armenia, old and new, see p. 6.

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Material for this issue
courtesy of
Newell Press Agency

Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C. and at
additional mailing offices.

Subscription Rates: 1 Year—\$3.95 3 Years—\$6.95.

Nothing in this issue may be reprinted or reproduced with-
out due acknowledgment to the magazine SOVIET LIFE.

Printed by Fawcett Printing Corp., Rockville, Md.

Georgi Petrov is on the staff of the Central State Archives of the October Revolution. He is presently writing a thesis on Alexandra Kollontai. The photographs are reproduced by courtesy of Madame Kollontai's family and the USSR Museum of the Revolution.

The hundredth anniversary of the birth of Alexandra Kollontai will be celebrated on April 1, 1972. Hers is a familiar name both in the USSR and internationally. Books have been written about her, a play on this remarkable woman has been in the Moscow Art Theater repertory for years, and two Soviet documentaries and a feature film have brought her to the screen.

Alexandra Kollontai led a most unusual life. She was a revolutionary, a close associate of Lenin, a fiery speaker for the revolution, the new Soviet government's first minister of social welfare, and a distinguished diplomat, ambassador to Norway, Mexico and Sweden.

"I like to look back on the road we've covered and then see the wonderful future when mankind, its freedom newly won, will proclaim happiness as its birthright," she wrote in her later years.

To Kollontai the purpose of life was to fight for the working people. At the age of 26 this daughter of an aristocrat—her father was a general in the czar's army—abandoned her privileged environment, joined the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party and became a dedicated revolutionary. From that time on, as Lenin put it, she gave the revolution "not just her free evenings but her whole life."

Alexandra Kollontai, like Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife and comrade, began her activity by leading workers' circles in Petersburg and speaking at underground gatherings. She studied conditions in Russia and the problems confronting the revolutionary movement, and wrote a number of articles on history, economics and social problems. As a speaker, Kollontai soon won a large following. She spent much of her time and energy bringing political enlightenment to the masses, and especially in drawing workingwomen into the revolutionary struggle.

Alexandra Kollontai

1872-1952

By Georgi Petrov



In 1900, to escape the czar's secret police, Kollontai had to leave Russia. She spent eight years abroad and helped to strengthen Russia's links with the revolutionary movement of the West. Her ability as a speaker and her knowledge of languages stood her in good stead. She spoke to worker audiences in Germany, Britain, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden, and to international socialist congresses in Copenhagen and Basel.

During World War I, as a member of the Bolshevik party, Kollontai carried out Lenin's assignment to rally left socialist forces throughout the world. Lenin prized her gifts as writer and speaker. In 1915, at the invitation of the American socialists, she visited the United States, where she spent five months touring the continent and appealing to workers to fight against the imperialist war. She publicized the Bolshevik view of the war and Lenin's revolutionary ideas. The American working-class press of the time carried glowing accounts of Kollontai's moving speeches.

After the February 1917 Revolution, she went back home. She did educational work with the seamen of the Baltic and with the women of Petrograd. She also became a regular contributor to *Pravda*, was elected to the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet and to the Bolshevik party Central Committee at the sixth party congress, participated in the most decisive meetings of the Central Committee and supported Lenin's call for an armed uprising.

In October 1917, the socialist revolution was victorious. On Lenin's recommendation Kollontai became People's Commissar of Social Welfare in the first Soviet government.

Lenin had a high regard for Kollontai's organizing abilities. While he frankly and firmly criticized her for errors, he helped her correct them and find the right solution. His admiration for her never wavered.

For half a year Alexandra Kollontai held the office of people's commissar. In that brief period she laid the foundations for a new state system of social insurance with no contribution from the worker's pay envelope. She arranged for payment of the first grants

and pensions, set up children's homes and opened a mother and child center, all completely unprecedented undertakings at the time. "Put Kollontai in charge, she'll do it," Lenin would say, and Kollontai did it. In 1919 she was sent to the Ukraine as People's Commissar of Propaganda and Agitation. As ever, she was occupied with the problem of drawing women into the construction of the socialist society. She did much writing on the subject, but her interest was far from theoretical—she was an indefatigable administrator and organizer.



Below: Alexandra Kollontai in 1888; Top right: Maksim Kollontai and his son; Right: At the International Socialist Congress in 1910.

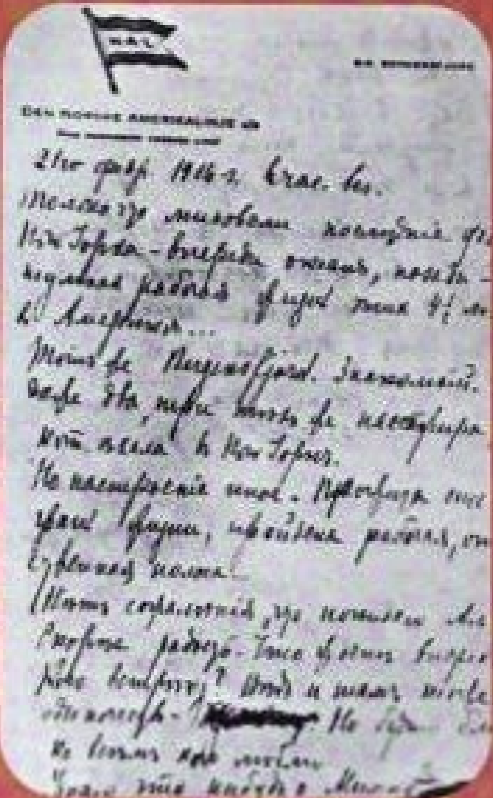


"I was born in 1872 into a family of the landed aristocracy. My father was a Russian general of Ukrainian origin, and my mother was of Finnish peasant stock.
 "From childhood I caused my mother a good deal of grief by my desire 'to live not the way others did.' I struck up friendships with the servants . . . stood up for my independence, revelled in books and lived in a world all my own, shut away from the adults."
 From autobiographical sketch by Alexandra Kollontai

In 1922 Alexandra Kollontai began her service as a diplomat, first representing the Soviet Union in Norway, then in Mexico and Sweden. She was the first of her sex to be named to such a post. Women had ruled kingdoms and empires before, but none had been the ambassador of a great power.
 "A diplomat isn't worthy of the name if he hasn't made new friends for his country," Kollontai used to say.
 She scored a number of major diplomatic successes as her country's representative. Norway, for example, was one



Right: Oslo, 1924. About to present her credentials as Soviet ambassador to Norway.
 Below: A page from her American diary.



Lenin chairing a meeting of the Council of People's Commissars in January 1918. Madame Kollontai is shown here seated next to Lenin, the eighth from left.

"I married early, partly as an act of defiance against my parents. But three years later I separated from my husband, engineer V. Kollontai, assuming full responsibility for bringing up my son. . . . We separated not because we stopped loving one another but because I felt oppressed and fettered by an environment from which the marriage with Kollontai did not rescue me. . . . I did not leave Kollontai for another man, but was caught up by the wave of growing revolutionary turmoil and events in Russia."

From "Reminiscences" by Alexandra Kollontai

of the first to recognize Soviet Russia.

Kollontai served as an unflinching advocate for the Soviet Union's peace-seeking foreign policy. As a member of the Soviet delegation to the League of Nations, from 1934 to 1939, she time and again urged the Soviet Union's proposals for averting a world war.

For 23 years Kollontai represented her country abroad. In the spring of 1945, when she returned to live in Moscow, she was past 70 but continued to advise to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

She held the highest Soviet

decoration, the Order of Lenin, and two orders of the Red Banner of Labor, the Order of Saint Olav, the highest decoration of Norway, and the Mexican El Aguila Azteca order. By Swedish law women could not be awarded decorations or medals. But King Gustav V, in recognition of her diplomatic services, sent Madame Kollontai his photograph in a silver frame engraved with his coat of arms in gold.

Alexandra Kollontai died on March 9, 1962. She lived a long, productive life. To the end she walked abreast of her age and remained dedicated to the people.



Below left: Madame Kollontai chats with President Calles of Mexico in 1926 after presenting her credentials as Soviet envoy. Below right: At the League of Nations in Geneva in 1936, Alexandra Kollontai and Boris Stein were the Soviet delegates.



On her way to the royal palace in Stockholm in 1930 to present her credentials to King Gustav V. Top: Kollontai is shown here in 1918 with some of the cephalopods under her care. An aristocrat by birth, at 26 she left the privileged environment in which her parents lived, joined the Russian Social Democrats and became a dedicated revolutionary.



With H. V. Johnson, U.S. Ambassador to Sweden, 1944. Above right: Nikolai Khrushchik, President of the Supreme Soviet, presents her with the Order of the Red Banner.



"Is it not far wiser and more humane to settle problems by agreement and negotiation, rather than plunge ahead with arms a-tit? There may be another war, several wars—but new methods are taking shape, new forms that will make it possible to settle problems between states. This makes me happy, especially the realization that the Soviet Union is trying to pave the way."

Alexandra Kollontai,
Seltchobaden, Sweden, 1939

"The capacity for dreaming helped me throughout my life. I saw the world not only as it was, but the way it could be if it were changed. This capacity helped me see into the future when our Soviet state was only beginning to take shape. I can say of myself that I loved intensely . . . that I lived my life fully. I have been a part of many great events. The principal thing for which I fought, about which I dreamed and for the sake of which I worked all my life—the socialist state—has become a reality."

Alexandra Kollontai