

23.2 Nadezhda K. Krupskaya, "What a Communist Ought to Be Like"

Nadezhda Konstantinova Krupskaya (1869–1939), a Russian social worker who married Lenin in 1898, aided Lenin in his revolutionary program as long as he lived and supported Bolshevik programs as his legacy after he died. From 1900 to 1917, she served as the secretary of the Bolshevik wing of the Social Democratic Party in Russia, which after the Revolution became the Communist Party of the USSR. (It was later as "General" Secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee that Stalin ruled the Soviet Union; Krupskaya's long secretaryship was of a more conventional nature.) Stalin's rude treatment of Krupskaya not long before her husband's death provoked the stroke-weakened Lenin into a rebuke of the future dictator, but Krupskaya had no inclination to publicize their differences and subsequently treated Stalin as Lenin's more or less rightful successor. In the following selection, she elaborates on Lenin's discussion of Communist ethics and morality.

Source: From *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia*, ed. and trans. William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992). Copyright © 1992 University of Michigan Press. Reprinted with permission. Krupskaya, Lenin's wife and closest friend, played an active role in educational and cultural matters at the time of the revolution, and for a brief period was Deputy Commissar of Education.

A communist is, first and foremost, *a person involved in society*, with strongly developed social instincts, who desires that all people should live well and be happy.

Communists can come from all classes of society, but most of all they are workers by birth. Why? Because the conditions of workers' lives are such as to nurture in them social instincts: collective labor, the success of which depends on the separate efforts of each; the same conditions of labor; common experiences; the common struggle for humane conditions of existence. All this brings workers closer together and unites them with the bonds of class solidarity. Let us take the capitalist class. The conditions of life for this class are completely different. Competition forces each capitalist to see another capitalist primarily as an opponent, who has to be tripped up. In the worker the capitalist sees only "worker's hands" which must labor for the creation of his, the capitalist's, profits. Of course, the common struggle against the working class unites capitalists, but that internal unity, that formation into a collective which we see among workers—they have nothing to divide among themselves—does not exist in the capitalist class, where solidarity is corroded by competition. That is why in the working class the person with well-developed social instincts is the rule, while among the capitalists such a person is the exception.

Social instinct means a great many things. Often it offers a clue for finding a way out of a situation, for choosing the correct path. That is why during the purge of the RKP [Russian Communist Party], attention was paid to whether this or that member of the party had been born in a working family or not. He who comes from a worker's background will more easily straighten himself out. The Russian intelligentsia, seeing how easily a worker, thanks to this class instinct, comprehends that which an intellectual, for example, perceives only with great difficulty, was inclined, in the end of the nineties and in the first half of the first decade of the twentieth century (1896–1903) to exaggerate the significance of class instinct. *Rabochaya Mysl'* [Workers' Thought], one of the underground Social Democratic newspapers, even came to the conclusion that no one other than people from workingman backgrounds could be accepted as socialists. Since Marx and Engels were not workers, *Rabochaya Mysl'* wrote "We don't need Marx and Engels!"

Class instinct, which among workers coincides with a social one, is a necessary condition for being a communist. Necessary, but not sufficient.

A communist must also know quite a lot. First, he must understand what is happening around him, and must gain an understanding of the existing system. When the workers' movement began to develop in Russia, Social Democrats were concerned from the very first with the widespread distribution of such pamphlets as Dikshtein's "Who Lives by What," "Worker's Day," etc. But it is not enough to understand the mechanics of the capitalist system. The communist must also study the laws of the development of human society. He must know the history of the development of economic forms, of the development of property, of division into classes, of the development of state forms. He must understand their interdependence and know how religious and moral notions will develop out of a particular social structure. Understanding the laws of the development of human society, the communist must clearly picture to himself where social development is heading. Communism must be seen by him as not only a desired system, where the happiness of some will not be based on the misfortune of others; he must further understand that communism is that very system toward which mankind is moving, and that communists must clear a path to this system, and promote its speedy coming.

In workers' circles at the dawn of the workers' movement in Russia, commonly studied courses were, on the one hand, political economy, which had the aim of explaining the structure of contemporary society, and the history of culture (the history of culture was usually opposed to the regular exposition of history, which often presented just a set of hetero-

geneous historical data). That is why in the circles of those days they read the first volume of Marx's *Capital* and F. Engels' *The Origins of the Family, Property and State*.

In 1919, in one of the villages of Nizhny Novgorod province, in the village of Rabotki, I happened to come across this phenomenon. Teachers told me that in the intermediate school they taught political economy and the history of culture; that the students unanimously demanded the introduction of these subjects into the curriculum of the intermediate school.

Where could such a desire, and such a definitely formulated one, have come from among peasant youth in a Volga village whose population was occupied exclusively with Volga river trades and agriculture? Obviously, interest in political economy and the history of culture was brought into Rabotki by some worker, who at one time had attended some circle and who explained to the children what they needed to know.

However, at the present moment the Russian communist must know not only that. The October Revolution opened for Russia an opportunity for widespread building in the direction of communism. But in order to utilize these possibilities it is necessary to know what one can do at the moment in order to make at least one first step toward communism, and what one cannot, and it is necessary to know how to build a new life. It is necessary first and foremost to know thoroughly that sphere of work which you have undertaken, and then to master the method of a communist *approach* to the matter. Let us take an example. In order to organize correctly medical affairs in the country, it is first necessary to know the situation itself, secondly, how it was organized earlier in Russia and is currently organized in other states, and thirdly, how to approach the problem in a communist manner, namely, to conduct agitation among wide strata of workers, to interest them, to attract them to work, to create with their efforts a powerful organization in regard to medical affairs. It is necessary not only to know how to do all this, but to be able to *do* it. Thus it follows that a communist must know not only what communism is and why it is inevitable, but also know his own affairs well, and be able to approach the masses, influence them, and convince them.

In his personal life, a communist must always conduct himself in the interests of communism. What does this mean? It means, for example, that however nice it might be to stay in a familiar, comfortable home environment, that if for the sake of the cause, for the success of the communist cause, it is necessary to abandon everything and expose oneself to danger, the communist will do this. It means that however difficult and responsible the task the communist is called upon to perform, he will take it upon himself and try to carry it out to the best of his strength and skill, whether it is at the front, during the confiscation of valuables, etc. It means that the communist puts his personal interests aside, subordinates them to the common interest. It means that the communist is not indifferent to what is happening around him and that he actively struggles with that which is harmful to the interests of the toiling masses, and that he on the other hand actively defends these interests and makes them his own. . . .

Who was discarded during the purging of the party? (a) the self-seekers and their adherents, that is, those who put their personal interests above the communist cause; (b) those who were indifferent to communism, who did nothing to help it make headway, who stood far from the masses and made no efforts to draw closer to them; (c) those who did not enjoy the respect and love of the masses; (d) those who were distinguished by a coarse manner, conceit, insincerity and other such characteristics.

Thus, in order to be a communist: (1) it is necessary to know what is bad about the capitalist system, where social development is heading and how to promote the speediest coming of the communist system; (2) it is necessary to know how to apply one's knowledge to the cause; and (3) it is necessary to be spiritually and physically devoted to the interests of the working masses and to communism.

Questions:

1. Why does Krupskaya find well-developed social instincts to characterize most workers most of the time but to be rare among capitalists?
2. What are some of the areas in which Communists should acquire extensive knowledge?
3. What are some aspects of a Communist's personal life, according to Krupskaya?