Lenin's Sincerity and Hatred of Unreality

One of the secrets of Lenin's power is his terrible sincerity. He was sincere with his friends. He was gratified, of course, with each accession to the ranks, but he would not enlist a single recruit by painting in roseate hues the conditions of service, or the future prospects. Rather he tended to paint things blacker than they were. The burden of many of Lenin's speeches was: "The goal the Bolsheviks are striving for is far away—further away than most of you dream. We have led Russia along a rough road, but the course we follow will bring us more enemies, more hunger. Difficult as the past has been, the future promises harder things—harder than you imagine." Not an alluring promise. Not the usual call to arms! Yet as the Italians rallied to Garibaldi, who came offering wounds, prison and death, the Russians rallied to Lenin. This was a little discomforting to one expecting the leader to glorify his cause and to urge the prospective convert into joining it. He left the urge to come from within.

Lenin is sincere even with his avowed enemies. An Englishman, commenting on his extraordinary frankness, says his attitude was like this: "Personally, I have nothing against you. Politically, however, you are my enemy and I must use every weapon I can think of for your destruction. Your government does the same against me. Now let us see how far we can go along together."

This stamp of sincerity is on all his public utterances. Lenin is lacking in the usual outfit of the statesman-politician—bluff, glittering verbiage and success-psychology. One felt that he could not fool others even if he desired to. And for the same reasons that he could not fool himself: His scientific attitude of mind, his passion for the facts.

His lines of information ran out in every direction, bringing him multitudes of facts. These he weighed, sifted and assayed. Then he utilised them as a strategist, a master chemist working in social elements, mathematician. He would approach a subject in this way:

"Now the facts that count for us are these: One, two, three, four—" He would briefly enumerate them. "And the factors that are against us are these."

In the same way he would count them up, "One, two, three, four—Are there any others?" he would ask. We would rack our brains for another, but generally in vain. Elaborating the points on each side, pro and contra, he would proceed with his calculation as with a problem in mathematics.

In his glorification of the fact he is the very opposite of Wilson. Wilson as word-artist gilds all subjects with glittering phrases, dazzling and mesmerizing the people and blinding them to the ugly realities and crass economic facts involved. Lenin comes as a surgeon with his scalpel. He uncovers the simple economic motives that lie behind the grand language of the imperialists. Their proclamations to the Russian people he strips bare and naked, revealing behind their fair promises the black and grasping hand of the exploiters.

Relentless as he is towards the phraseologists of the Right, he is equally hard upon those phraseologists of the Left who seek refuge from reality in revolutionary slogans. He feels it his

duty "to pour vinegar and bile into the sweetened waters of revolutionary-democratic eloquence," and he treats the sentimentalist and shouter of shibboleths with caustic ridicule.

When the Germans were making their drive upon the Red Capital a flood of telegrams poured in on Smolny from all over Russia, expressing amazement, horror and indignation. They ended with slogans like "Long live the invincible Russian proletariat!" "Death to the imperialistic robbers!" "With our last drop of blood we will defend the Capital of the Revolution!"

Lenin read them and then despatched a telegram to all the Soviets, asking them kindly not to send revolutionary phrases to Petrograd, but to send troops; also to state precisely the number of volunteers enrolled, and to forward an exact report upon the arms, ammunition and food conditions.

From 'Ten Months with Lenin' by Albert Rhys Williams