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PEACE AFTER THE STORM

Pen Portrait of a Frustrated Revolutionary

THE peace negotiations between Russia and Finland have been broken off. Russia's terms, the Finns say, were too severe. New Zealand does not yet know what the terms were, but one of the reasons for hoping that the discussions would succeed was the fact that Russia was represented by Alexandra Kollontay, one of Finland's early friends, and Europe's only woman ambassador. Here is a "profile" of Mme. Kollontay from the English "Observer."

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAY, Soviet Ambassador in Stockholm, was born in 1872. Her father was a general of the Russian Imperial Army. Alexandra's childhood and youth exemplified the typical Russian conflict between parents and children, a conflict which used to provide the background for so many Russian novels. She was hardly 10 years old when Tsar Alexander II. was assassinated by a conspiracy in which the children of many Russian noblemen were involved.

Her father decided to keep her from the higher education, wherein she might easily be infected by the germs of *Weltschmerz* and revolt. The quiet drawing-room for her! But the temperamental girl was not to be tamed, and the drawing-rooms of high society were not so quiet after all.

In 1896, the Russian police discovered that the general's daughter had been involved in a strike of textile workers in Petrograd. Soon, the general saw to it that his daughter should discreetly disappear from Russia. Alexandra went abroad, but there again she got in touch with the many Russian revolutionary circles active in Geneva, Paris, and London. She met Plekhanov and Lenin, and joined the Social Democratic Party. When the party split into Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, Kollontay at first joined neither neither faction. Later on, she decided to follow the Mensheviks.

LENIN'S faction was too stern and rigid in its outlook to attract so fiery a woman. In those years Alexandra Kollontay got her preliminary training for her future diplomatic career. She lived in Germany, France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. She studied political conditions everywhere, and became a fine linguist.

In 1915, Alexandra Kollontay—by then already well-known in Russian revolutionary circles as a brilliant orator and journalist—parted with the moderate Mensheviks and joined the Bolsheviks. In the controversy between the Socialists who supported the war and those who uncompromisingly opposed it—Kollontay sided with the anti-militarists. In 1916-17, she was on the staff of the revolutionary Russian weekly, *Novy Mir*, published in New York. The other members of the staff were Trotsky and Bukharin.

IN 1917, the editorial staff of *Novy Mir* returned to Russia. In the turbulent atmosphere of the revolutionary months of that year, Kollontay became one of the most brilliant speakers and agitators of Bolshevism. She was elected member of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet. In June, 1917, when the threat of the Bolshevik Revolution became imminent, Kerensky tried to save his Government by drastic action. He imprisoned the

chief speakers of the Revolutionary Party. Lenin and Zinoviev went into hiding in Finland. Trotsky and Kollontay were arrested. But the repressions came too late. The ascendancy of Bolshevism had become irresistible. On November 7, the Second Congress of the Councils of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants' Delegates proclaimed the overthrow of the Kerensky Government and the inauguration of the Soviet



ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAY

regime. Fourteen leading Bolsheviks were elected to the Praesidium of the Congress; Kollontay was one of them. She is now the only survivor of the 14.

The Revolution was Alexandra Kollontay's element. Yet her conception of the new order was not purely economic or political. She saw in the Revolution the overthrow of all the traditional forms of life and especially of family life. Even before 1917, she led the Russian Feminist Movement. Now she proclaimed the end of the family and the era of "free love." Madame Kollontay—one of Russia's most beautiful women—was the Madame Pompadour of the Russian Revolution.

In the years of Revolution, she was married to Dybenko, one of the most romantic figures among the leaders of the civil war. Dybenko, a black-bearded giant, had been a plain, uneducated sailor. He became the leader of the revolt of the Baltic Fleet in 1917 and later on, the first Commissar of the Red Navy. He was temperamental, violent, wild in language. He was also a mild and almost sentimental dreamer. In the days of the Revolution, he threatened to hang the commanding staff of the Baltic Fleet "on the mast-head"; but a few months later, he resigned from his office in protest against the re-introduction of the death penalty by the Bolsheviks. Dybenko's name is

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