

INESSA ARMAND

*Revolutionary and
feminist*



R. C. ELWOOD

Carleton University, Ottawa



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INTRODUCTION

At 3 a.m. in the early morning of 11 October 1920 Polina Vinogradskaia was awakened by the ringing of her telephone. The hour of the call and the fact that the Moscow telephone system was working at all must have surprised her but not as much as the identity of her caller. The high-pitched voice at the other end of the line belonged to the head of the new Soviet state, V. I. Lenin. He was calling to tell Vinogradskaia that the body of their mutual friend, Inessa Armand, was just arriving at the Kazan Station. Was she ready? Could she meet them on the train platform?¹ He did not have to say that Armand had died of cholera at the age of forty-six while on a vacation in the Caucasus he insisted she take. Vinogradskaia knew since she also had been there and was well aware that her caller's hectoring telegrams to local officials to make sure Armand was properly cared for and protected from counter-revolutionary irregulars² had contributed to her unnecessary evacuation from Kislovodsk. After five days of being shunted from one dirty train station to another and six nights of sleeping in a crowded railway car, their friend had contracted the dread disease and died in the small town of Nal'chik on 24 September 1920.

It was still dark when Vinogradskaia arrived at the nearly deserted Kazan Station. Standing quietly on the platform with Lenin and his wife Nadezhda Krupskaja were Armand's five children, ranging in age from sixteen to twenty-five, her estranged husband Alexander Armand, and several women from Zhenotdel, the Women's Section of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party which Inessa directed at the time of her death. By 8 a.m. the cortège was on its way through the gloomy cobblestone streets of a city still suffering from the effects of more than six years of world war, mass revolution and civil war. Lenin insisted on walking behind the horse-drawn catafalque as it made the 3

¹ P. S. Vinogradskaia, *Sobytiia i pamiatnye vstrechi* (Moscow, 1968), pp. 227–8.

² *Leninskii sbornik*, vol. XXXVII (Moscow, 1970), p. 233; V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols. (Moscow, 1958–65), vol. LI, pp. 261, 262, 265, 273 (hereafter PSS).

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kilometre trip down Kalanchevkaia and Miasnitskaia, past the headquarters of the Cheka in Liubianskaia Square, to the House of Unions where the body was to lie in state. To Alexander Armand, once a wealthy textile manufacturer before being expropriated by his fellow mourners, the choice of this impressive eighteenth-century building must have seemed ironic. He had visited it on occasion when it had served as a club for the Moscow aristocracy and he had sat in its Hall of Columns as a liberal deputy to the Moscow City Duma fifteen years earlier. Now his wife's body was to lie on a dais in the Small Hall surrounded by an honour guard of four women from Zhenotdel. The walls were already decorated with revolutionary banners while around the unopened casket were put a score of wreaths, including a large one of white hyacinths with the inscription 'To Comrade Inessa – from V. I. Lenin'.³

At noon the next day, the zinc-lined coffin was carried through Theatre Square and the Square of the Revolution past the hideous Historical Museum to the walls of the Kremlin in Red Square. The mourners on that clear, sunny fall day included what *Izvestiia* called an 'endless flow of women workers'⁴ paying their last respects to a person who had quietly but effectively championed the equality of women in the workplace, in trade unions, in the party and in the home. If they were near the freshly dug grave they would have heard V. I. Nevskii, speaking in the name of the party's Central Committee, praise Armand as a revolutionary leader and Old Bolshevik who joined the party before the 1905 Revolution. S. I. Polidorov spoke for the Moscow Soviet in lauding the deceased's work as head of the Moscow Guberniia Sovnarkhoz (Economic Council) where, 'thanks to her knowledge of economics and her experience, she successfully put the economic construction of Moscow Guberniia on a firm foundation'.⁵ Aleksandra Kollontai, her colleague and sometime rival in the women's movement, gave an 'especially impassioned speech'⁶ about Inessa's role in 1914 in establishing and editing *Rabotnitsa*, the first Bolshevik paper for women workers, and about her subsequent efforts to attract women to party and soviet work. Anna Kalygina, speaking for the Moscow section of Zhenotdel, noted that these accomplishments were all the more impres-

³ Vinogradskaia, pp. 231–2; *Izvestiia*, 12 October 1920, p. 4; *Pravda*, 12 October 1920, p. 1; *Lenin v Moskve: mesta prebyvaniia, daty i sobytiia* (Moscow, 1959), p. 166. See also photograph of Armand's coffin lying in state in *Kommunistka*, 1920, no. 5, p. 19.

⁴ *Izvestiia*, 13 October 1920, p. 2. See also a photograph of the many women in the funeral procession in Pavel Podliashuk, *Tovarishch Inessa: dokumental'naia povest'*, 4th edn (Moscow, 1984).

⁵ *Pravda*, 13 October 1920, p. 2.

⁶ *Izvestiia*, 13 October 1920, p. 2.

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sive since Armand had had to rise above her 'rich bourgeois background'.⁷ There followed three more speeches by representatives of working women in Petrograd, the Far East and the Caucasus. Finally, after the firing of a military salute and the singing of the 'Internationale', the body of Inessa Armand was laid to rest in the 'Red Graveyard'.

It may have seemed curious to some that Lenin, who had known Armand well for over eleven years and had shown such personal concern about her funeral arrangements, was not among the speakers in Red Square. One of those present, who saw him standing with his crying wife by the side of the grave, felt that he would have been physically unable to do so.

I never saw such torment. I never saw any human being so completely absorbed by sorrow . . . Not only his face but his whole body expressed so much sorrow that I dared not greet him . . . It was clear that he wanted to be alone with his grief. He seemed to have shrunk . . . his eyes seemed drowned in tears held back with effort . . .⁸

* * *

Within a decade, the contributions of Inessa Armand to the revolutionary and women's movements in Russia which had been so praised by her funeral orators in Red Square had been forgotten or suppressed. Six months after her death, the New Economic Policy brought to an end the Sovnarkhoz experiment in economic centralization and nationalization; in 1930 Zhenotdel was closed down by a male-dominated party no longer interested in paying lip service to female equality and family reform; and, in the 1930s, Old Bolsheviks, especially those from rich bourgeois backgrounds, disappeared from the history books as well as from the party itself. Biographies of Lenin and histories of the party, whether written in the Soviet Union or the West, almost without exception failed to mention the name of Inessa Armand during the last quarter-century of Stalin's life, let alone her leading role as a revolutionary and a feminist in Lenin's time.⁹

Ironically, if the funeral orations had been forgotten in the Soviet Union by the time of Stalin's death, Lenin's conduct at the funeral was being recalled at the same time in the West and offered up as evidence of

⁷ *Pravda*, 13 October 1920, p. 2.

⁸ Angelica Balabanoff, *Impressions of Lenin* (Ann Arbor, 1964), pp. 14–15.

⁹ See, for instance, the early biographies of Lenin by Valeriu Marcu (1928), Christopher Hollis (1938) and David Shub (1948); the party histories of N. N. Popov (1926) and Em. Iaroslavskii (1929); and Stalin's *Short Course* (1938).

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yet another reason for Soviet reticence concerning Inessa Armand. In 1952, a disgruntled French Communist remembered a conversation he had had many years earlier with Aleksandra Kollontai in Oslo which touched on Lenin's behaviour in October 1920. The Bolshevik leader 'was unrecognizable' at the funeral, Kollontai told Marcel Body. 'He walked with his eyes closed and every moment we thought he might fall to the ground.'¹⁰ Her explanation for his distraught state and inferentially for his great personal interest in the funeral arrangements was that Lenin had been in love with Armand for many years before the revolution. The affair had been so intense, she said, that Krupskaja offered to leave her husband in 1911 to facilitate his happiness with the 'other woman'.¹¹ This undocumented revelation was picked up by Bertram Wolfe who received confirmation of its supposed accuracy from Angelica Balabanoff, once an important figure in the communist movement but now an elderly and disillusioned woman, who had also been present at the funeral. While Wolfe discounted Balabanoff's assertion that Armand had had a child by Lenin, he felt that there was other evidence to support the conclusion that the two had probably been lovers from 1910 to 1916. He was particularly struck by Soviet reluctance to publish Lenin's voluminous correspondence with Armand and by his highly unusual use of the familiar form of address in the few edited letters that appeared in Stalin's lifetime.¹²

Western biographers were overjoyed that Wolfe had found a human element in Lenin and many rushed off to discover other loves in his life.¹³ Few bothered to question the veracity of his evidence¹⁴ and none showed much interest in Inessa Armand beyond portraying her as a Paris-born woman of striking beauty who had a talent for foreign languages and for playing the piano. In all other respects, she was simply Lenin's close comrade-in-arms and of no particular consequence in her own right as a revolutionary. During the last decade, some

¹⁰ Quoted by Marcel Body, 'Alexandra Kollontai', *Preuves* (Paris), vol. II, no. 14 (April 1952), p. 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Bertram D. Wolfe, 'Lenin and Inessa Armand', *Slavic Review*, vol. XXII, no. 1 (March 1963), pp. 96–114.

¹³ See, for example, Louis Fischer, *The Life of Lenin* (New York, 1964); Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Lenin* (New York, 1964); Stefan T. Possony, *Lenin: The Compulsive Revolutionary* (Chicago, 1964); Robert H. McNeal, *Bride of the Revolution: Krupskaya and Lenin* (Ann Arbor, 1972); Ladislaus Singer, *Korrekturen zu Lenin* (Stuttgart, 1980); M. C. Morgan, *Lenin* (London, 1971).

¹⁴ Among those who did were Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (New York, 1965) and Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, vol. I: *Theory and Practice in the Democratic Revolution* (New York, 1977).

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Western scholars of the Russian women's movement, most notably Richard Stites and Barbara Clements, have been less flippant and more willing to acknowledge Armand's contributions to post-revolutionary Soviet feminism.¹⁵ Even they, however, have paid little attention to her pre-war interest in women's issues or to her decisive role in establishing *Rabotnitsa*.¹⁶

Following Stalin's death, Soviet and Soviet-approved writers also rediscovered Inessa Armand. In 1957 Jean Fréville, a French poet and communist with the cooperation of Inessa's daughter Inna, wrote an authorized biography of his compatriot¹⁷ which has generously been described as 'thin and pious'.¹⁸ Poetic licence is the least of the faults of his misleading exercise in hagiography. Six years later, at the same time that Bertram Wolfe's account was appearing in the *Slavic Review*, the first Soviet biography of her was published by Pavel Podliashuk.¹⁹ Now in its fourth edition, *Tovarishch Inessa* is a popular account designed to make Armand into a role model for sixteen-year-old Russian girls. With

¹⁵ Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton, 1977) and Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai* (Bloomington, 1979). See also Beatrice Farnsworth, *Aleksandra Kollontai: Socialism, Feminism and the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, 1980). Like the less flamboyant Armand, Kollontai's importance as a political leader and feminist was for many decades dismissed by male historians fascinated only by her theories about 'free love' and her libertine lifestyle. Unlike Armand, Kollontai is now generally accepted as the preeminent figure in the communist women's movement and indeed is often given credit for some of Armand's accomplishments.

¹⁶ It is indicative that two recent and important studies of pre-revolutionary Russian feminism virtually ignore Armand's contributions to the women's movement. See Linda Harriet Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia, 1900–1917* (Stanford, 1984) and Rochelle Lois Goldberg, 'The Russian Women's Movement: 1859–1917' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1976).

¹⁷ Jean Fréville, *Une grand figure de la Révolution russe: Inessa Armand* (Paris, 1957). See also review by L. M. Egorova in *Istoriia SSSR*, 1958, no. 4, p. 188.

¹⁸ Richard Stites, 'Kollontai, Inessa, and Krupskaja: A Review of Recent Literature', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, vol. IX, no. 1 (Spring 1975), p. 87.

¹⁹ Pavel Podliashuk, *Tovarishch Inessa: dokumental'naia povest'*, 1st edn (Moscow, 1963). The *New York Times* speculated that the renewed Soviet interest in Armand was an attempt to counteract recent Western fascination with Lenin's love life. This was reflected, the paper said, in commemorative articles praising Armand's virtues that had appeared in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* on her ninetieth birthday and in the concurrent closing of *Time* magazine's Moscow bureau for 'touching with dirty fingers the memory of the founder of the Soviet state' in its 24 April 1964 issue (*New York Times*, 17 May 1964, p. 23; see also *Pravda*, 8 May 1964, p. 4, and *Izvestiia*, 8 May 1964, p. 4). An equally plausible explanation for Podliashuk's biography was the imminent appearance of Lenin's hitherto unpublished correspondence to Armand in volumes XLVIII and XLIX of his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. Someone had to tell inquisitive Soviet readers something about this obscure woman to whom their leader had written over one hundred letters and whose body lay in the hallowed precincts behind his mausoleum.

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far more attention to historical accuracy than Fréville, Podliashuk portrays Armand as a good mother, as a dedicated revolutionary who endured five arrests and several years in tsarist detention and, above all, as a loyal and efficient disciple of Lenin. Little of consequence is said about her early life in the 'nest of gentlefolk', about the way in which she became a revolutionary, about her work as an underground propagandist long before she met Lenin, about the role of the Armand family in financing the Bolshevik cause, or about her work as a feminist after the revolution. Needless to say, even less is said about her willingness to contradict and oppose Lenin on the numerous occasions when she felt he was wrong in political matters or inconsiderate in personal relations.

These unanswered questions are some of the issues which the present biography seeks to address. Inessa Armand will be viewed primarily as a revolutionary: first as a Social Democratic propagandist in Moscow from 1904 to 1907, then as a Bolshevik organizer and spokeswoman for Lenin in emigration from 1910 to 1917, and finally as a Communist administrator from 1918 to 1920. She also will be seen as a feminist – a term which she herself would have rejected – working to rehabilitate prostitutes before the 1905 Revolution, trying to organize women workers on the eve of the war, and seeking to achieve female equality in the new Soviet state. Insofar as the sources permit, an attempt will be made to illuminate both her personal qualities which so impressed many of her revolutionary colleagues and also her personal relationship with Lenin which has so intrigued recent Western writers to the detriment of serious study of other aspects of her life.

While I disagree with many of Bertram Wolfe's conclusions, I am indebted to him for having aroused my interest in Inessa Armand and for having raised some of the important issues in her life. I also recognize that Mr Wolfe did not have at his disposal many of the sources on which this biography is based. The veil of obscurity over her revolutionary career before 1909 and her family life, for example, has been partially lifted with the recent publication of more than sixty of Inessa's letters to her children, her husband Alexander and his brother Vladimir.²⁰ While heavily edited and obviously incomplete, these letters offer the best

²⁰ The largest number of these letters appear in I. F. Armand, *Stat'i, rechi, pis'ma* (Moscow, 1975), pp. 179–257. Somewhat more complete versions of many of these are to be found in 'Pis'ma Inessy Armand', *Novyi mir*, 1970, no. 6, pp. 196–218. Portions of twelve other letters not found in either of these collections are included in the fourth edition of Podliashuk (Moscow, 1984) and in Vladimir Sanov, 'Mezenskaia ballada', *Sever*, 1971, no. 12, pp. 82–96. The most recent compilation, S. Vinogradov's *Sokrovishcha dushevnoi krasoty* (Moscow, 1984), offers nothing which has not already been published.

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insight available into her personality and the evolution of her early political thinking. Since 1964 ninety-five new letters from Lenin to Armand have appeared in the fifth edition of his collected works and in recent volumes of the *Leninskii sbornik* in addition to more complete versions of the twenty-three that were belatedly published in the fourth edition.²¹ This correspondence, which is concentrated in the period from December 1913 to April 1917, reveals much not only about Lenin but also about Armand's party activities in emigration and her often troubled relations with the Bolshevik leader. The period from 1909 to 1917 is also covered by the twenty-two police reports found in the Okhrana Archives of the Hoover Institution. These reports, which were first made available to scholars in 1964, are neither sensational nor unique in their revelations but they do add useful confirmation and detail to published memoir literature. Scholars have long been aware of the reminiscences of Armand's contemporaries collected by Krupskaja and published in 1926.²² Very little attention has been paid, however, either to the host of other and often obscure memoirs that appeared in Soviet journals in the 1920s²³ or to the few brief but interesting accounts which started to reappear in the 1960s.²⁴ A study of Armand's short post-revolutionary career has been facilitated by the re-publication in 1975 of thirty-five of her journalistic articles and three short brochures.²⁵ While this corpus falls short of the one hundred articles two Soviet scholars claim she wrote,²⁶ I have found references to only five pieces not in this collection. Finally, it should be noted that persons interested in Armand's activity in the women's movement

²¹ Lenin, PSS, vols. XLVIII and XLIX; *Leninskii sbornik*, vols. XXXV (1945), pp. 108–9, XXXVII (1970), pp. 35–8, 52–8, 233, XL (1985), pp. 49–50; 'Novye dokumenty V. I. Lenina', *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1989, no. 1, pp. 215–16.

²² N. K. Krupskaja (ed.), *Pamiati Inessy Armand* (Moscow, 1926). Krupskaja's own *Reminiscences of Lenin* (Moscow, 1959), which first appeared in Russian in 1926, also contain interesting if somewhat sanitized and occasionally misleading information about her good friend Inessa.

²³ An invaluable bibliography of early Soviet historical literature pertaining to Armand will be found in V. I. Nevskii (ed.), *Deiateli revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii: Bio-bibliograficheskii slovar'*, vol. V: *Sotsial-demokraty, 1880–1904*, vyp. 1 (A–B) (Moscow, 1931), pp. 128–9.

²⁴ See, among others, the Vinogradskaja and Sanov items already cited as well as A. E. Margarian, 'Novoe ob Inesse Armand', *Voprosy istorii*, 1962, no. 3, pp. 213–15, and N. M. Druzhinin, 'O trekh uchastnitsakh revoliutsionnoi bor'by', *Voprosy istorii*, 1983, no. 1, pp. 85–9.

²⁵ Armand, *Stat'i*, pp. 23–176. While occasional ellipses appear in these versions, those that I have been able to check against the originals do not appear to involve the omission of extensive or significant material.

²⁶ Iu. Rusakov and V. Solov'ev, 'Stanovliius' bol'shevichkoi ...', *V mire knig*, 1978, no. 8, p. 79.

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especially and also as a Soviet administrator have been aided immeasurably by recent doctoral research done in the United States and Great Britain. One cannot help but be impressed by the quality of this research, much of which remains unpublished. While none of it deals extensively with Inessa Armand, in toto it provides the social and economic background which was absent from Western scholarship at the time Bertram Wolfe was writing.²⁷

Despite the wealth of material that has become available since 1963, certain periods in Armand's life remain poorly documented and valuable sources of information still remain inaccessible in Russian archives. The background of the Armand family, details about their comfortable life in Pushkino, and information about the revolutionary activity of Inessa's in-laws remain scarce. Unfortunately, Armand was very reluctant to talk about this period of her life with friends in the party or to write about it herself.²⁸ Several manuscripts which are important for an understanding of her intellectual maturation – a draft of her first major but unpublished article, a prospectus for a brochure on marriage and the family, and a very brief autobiography – appear to exist in Russian archives but have not been published in their entirety.²⁹ The most important lacuna, however, has resulted from the failure of Soviet authorities to publish almost any of Armand's extensive correspondence with Lenin.³⁰ It is frustrating in the extreme to hear only one side of an argument, especially when that point of view is expressed by a

²⁷ See, for example, the following unpublished Ph.D. dissertations on aspects of the women's movement: Laurie Bernstein, 'Sonia's Daughters: Prostitution and Society in Russia' (University of California, Berkeley, 1987); Anne Louise Bobroff, 'Working Women, Bonding Patterns, and the Politics of Daily Life: Russia at the End of the Old Regime', 2 vols. (University of Michigan, 1982); Carol Eubanks Hayden, 'Feminism and Bolshevism: The *Zhenotdel* and the Politics of Women's Emancipation in Russia, 1917–1930' (University of California, Berkeley, 1979); Amy W. Knight, 'The Participation of Women in the Revolutionary Movement in Russia, 1890–1914' (University of London, 1977). Other theses which I found particularly useful include Herbert Ray Buchanan, 'Soviet Economic Policy for the Transition Period: The Supreme Council of the National Economy, 1917–20' (Indiana University, 1972) and J. L. West, 'The Moscow Progressists: Russian Industrialists in Liberal Politics, 1905–1914' (Princeton University, 1975).

²⁸ Vinogradskaia, p. 208; Rusakov and Solov'ev, 'Stanovliius' bol'shevichkoi', p. 77.

²⁹ Her four-page 'autobiography', which was written in 1918, was discovered in 1964. Excerpts from it have appeared in recent editions of Podliashuk's biography.

³⁰ To my knowledge only a couple of letters written to Lenin in 1916 have ever been published. See *Blizhe vsekh: Lenin i iunye internatsionalisty (sbornik dokumentov i materialov)* (Moscow, 1968), pp. 152–7; Krupskaja, *Pamiati*, pp. 18–22. The rest of this correspondence would appear to be in *fonds* 17 and 127 of the Central Party Archives in the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. According to the *New York Times* (22 January 1992, p. A5), some of these are to be released in the fall of 1992 for eventual publication abroad.

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supposedly unquestionable source such as Lenin. A biographer would also like to see the seventeen unpublished letters he wrote to her, which are acknowledged to exist in the Central Party Archives of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism,³¹ as well as Inessa's correspondence with Alexander after 1910 which remains in family hands.³²

Until these documents are published or scholars are given better access to Russian archives, this account of Inessa Armand and her activities as a revolutionary and a feminist must remain incomplete in some of its detail and tentative in many of its conclusions.

³¹ References to the contents of these letters are made in Institut marksizma-leninizma pri TsK KPSS, *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin: biograficheskaia khronika*, 12 vols. (Moscow, 1970–82) (hereafter *Biog. khr.*). See Chapter 8, below, for a fuller discussion of this correspondence and reasons for its suppression.

³² See comments by Inna Armand in her introduction to 'Pis'ma Inessy Armand', p. 197.