

Message to Lenin 100 Conference

Alex Mitchell

Lenin has been my mentor and guide since my 20s. As a result, I became a rather pompous authority on his life. If I was confronted with a difficult decision in my life - whether to marry this lady or another, or take this job or that - I would ask myself: "What would Lenin do?" Sometimes Lenin's advice was good, but other times it was bad. Very bad. As an example, Lenin, the banned Russian revolutionary, was alarmingly carefree with his security. He was a terrible judge of character, particularly those who stopped him in the street, women or visitors to Moscow, who wanted an autograph. He wrote many books stressing the need for tight security, but it was theoretical and not practical. In 1901, he wrote *What Is To Be Done?*, which railed against dogmatism and celebrated freedom of criticism but in practice he did the opposite. I read and studied all of his writings - Lenin with the assistance of his wife/life partner Krupskaya - wrote dozens of books which lined my shelves. Ignorant commentators said his slogan for Russia's 1917 October Revolution - Bread, Peace and Land - was a motto stolen from others. That is a lie! Lenin's motto was derived from dialectics. He wanted to appeal to three sectors - Bread was for the hungry, Peace for war-weary soldiers and sailors, and Land was aimed at recruiting Russia's peasantry. Of all Lenin's sayings my favourite is: "We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and we

have to advance almost constantly under their fire. We have combined, by a freely adopted decision, for the purpose of fighting the enemy, and not of retreating to the neighbouring marsh, the inhabitants of which, from the very outset, have reproached us for having separated ourselves into an exclusive group and with having chosen the path of struggle instead of the path of conciliation. And now some among us begin to cry out: ‘Let us go back into the marsh!’ And when we begin to shame them, they retort, ‘What backward people you are! Are you not ashamed to deny us the liberty to invite you to take a better road?’ ‘Oh yes, gentlemen! You are free not only to invite us, but to go yourselves wherever you will, even into the marsh. In fact, we think that the marsh is your proper place, and we are prepared to render you every assistance to get there. Only let go of our hands, do not clutch at us and do not besmirch the grand word freedom, for we too are free to go where we please, for to fight not only against the marsh, but also against those who are turning towards the marsh!’” It was typical Lenin: brutally frank, and dismissive of opponents whether they were in his own ranks or not. Lenin makes today’s class compromisers look like second-raters.

Alex Mitchell was a former leader of Britain’s Workers Revolutionary Party and its global affiliate, the International Committee of the Fourth International. A former journalist, Mitchell now lives in Australia where he is an acclaimed author. Judith White, his partner-wife, writes books on culture and art history.