



ROBERT SERVICE

LENIN

A BIOGRAPHY



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CONTENTS

Preface xi

Note on Transliteration and Calendars xiii

List of Illustrations xv

Glossary of Names of Lenin and his Family xvii

Maps xix

INTRODUCTION 1

ONE: THE REBEL EMERGES

1. THE ULYANOVs AND THE BLANKS 13

2. CHILDHOOD IN SIMBIRSK 31

1870-1885

3. DEATHS IN THE FAMILY 47

1886-1887

4. THE PLOUGHING OF THE MIND 61

1887-1888

CONTENTS

5. PATHS TO REVOLUTION 74

1889-1893

6. ST PETERSBURG 91

1893-1895

7. TO SIBERIAN ITALY 107

1895-1900

TWO: LENIN AND THE PARTY

8. AN ORGANISATION OF REVOLUTIONARIES 129

1900-1902

9. 'HOLY FIRE' 147

1902-1904

10. RUSSIA FROM FAR AND NEAR 166

1905-1907

11. THE SECOND EMIGRATION 184

1908-1911

12. ALMOST RUSSIA! 202

1912-1914

13. FIGHTING FOR DEFEAT 222

1914-1915

14. LASTING OUT 235

1915-1916

THREE: SEIZING POWER

15. ANOTHER COUNTRY 253

February to April 1917

16. THE RUSSIAN COCKPIT 270

May to July 1917

17. POWER FOR THE TAKING 287

July to October 1917

18. THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION 308

October to December 1917

CONTENTS

19. DICTATORSHIP UNDER SIEGE 324

Winter 1917-1918

20. BREST-LITOVSK 338

January to May 1918

21. AT GUNPOINT 356

May to August 1918

FOUR: DEFENCE OF THE REVOLUTION

22. WAR LEADER 373

1918-1919

23. EXPANDING THE REVOLUTION 391

April 1919 to April 1920

24. DEFEAT IN THE WEST 406

1920

25. THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY 421

January to June 1921

26. A QUESTION OF SURVIVAL 435

July 1921 to July 1922

27. DISPUTING TO THE LAST 451

September to December 1922

28. DEATH IN THE BIG HOUSE 464

1923-1924

LENIN: THE AFTERLIFE 481

Notes 495

Select Bibliography 522

Index 531

Preface

This book was read in draft by Adele Biagi, David Godwin, Heather Godwin, Martyn Rady, Arfon Rees and Tanya Stobbs, and John Klier read the first chapter. Their suggestions made for very welcome improvements. Several helpful tips were also offered by Philip Cavendish, Myszka Davies, Norman Davies, Bill Fishman, Julian Graffy, Riitta Heino, John Klier, Richard Ramage, Arfon Rees, Kay Schiller and Faith Wigzell. I should also like to thank John Screen and Lesley Pitman in the School of Slavonic and East European Studies Library in London and Jackie Willcox in the St Antony's Russian Centre Library in Oxford for their assistance in getting important material on to the stacks. David King generously introduced me to the wonders of his personal collection of Soviet photographs and posters, and I am immensely grateful for his permission to use some here. A particular debt is also owed to the staff of the Russian Centre for the Conservation and Study of Documents of Contemporary History, especially Kirill Anderson, Larisa Rogovaya, Yelena Kirillova, Irina Selezneva and Larisa Malashenko; and to Vladimir Kozlov at the State Archive of the Russian Federation. Russian fellow historians who have given me useful ideas for research include Gennadi Bordyugov, Vladimir Buldakov, Oleg Khlevniuk, Vladimir Kozlov and Andrei Sakharov.

Lenin is a subject of great political and emotional resonance in Russia and I am grateful for the encouragement given by Russian friends to undertake this biography. I am aware that as a foreigner I may be walking into sensitive areas, perhaps even with hobnailed boots. Then again this is perhaps what the biography of Lenin requires.

For several years on my way to work in central London I used to cycle past buildings where Lenin lived, edited or researched. One route took me through Highbury (where *Iskra* editors had their Russian mail sent) and on to the St Pancras district (where Lenin lived in 1900), across Gray's Inn Road (with its pubs where Lenin drank with party comrades in 1905) and along Tavistock Place (where he lived for some months in 1908). It strengthened a feeling that my subject was not quite as exotic as it sometimes

appeared. But of course it is in Russia that fuller perspective on his life and times must be obtained. The Kremlin, Red Square and the Smolny Institute are buildings that have to be visited in order to acquire a sense of time and place. I have tried in the following chapters also to give a sense of personality. In this connection it was a pleasure to meet and spend an afternoon with Viktoria Nikolaevna Ulyanova, one of the few people alive who knew the Ulyanov family members mentioned in the book. Her generosity of spirit – a trait not shared by Lenin, her husband's uncle – demonstrates that not everything that happened in Russia earlier this century was absolutely inevitable.

Lastly, I want to thank my family – my wife Adele and our boisterous descendants Emma, Owain, Hugo and Francesca – for discussing the contents of the book. Each of them has read lengthy sections and helped with the editing. They have displayed the same attitude as those millions of Soviet citizens who, while acknowledging Lenin's huge historical significance, took an interest in his private – and occasionally comic – foibles. I have tried to write a book that brings together the public and private aspects. Until the opening of the Moscow archives in the 1990s a biography of this kind was unfeasible. And I hope the chapters provide material for my family as well as for readers more generally to go on resolving the enduring questions of Lenin's career and impact.

Robert Service
Oxford, May 1999