

«Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World»

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What being the First Lady is like. Social activities of Nadezhda Krupskaya and Clementine Churchill



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Thesis

What being the First Lady is like. Social activities of Nadezhda Krupskaya and Clementine Churchill

Where does the idea of the First Lady come from? If you are a King you need a Queen; if you are a President or Prime Minister you must have a First Lady. Over the years, First Ladies have been managers, renovators and hostesses. More recently they have been campaigners, social activists and policy advocates.

In our essay we are going to find out the role of the First Ladies, Clementine Churchill, the wife of the British Prime-Minister, Winston Churchill and Nadezhda Krupskaya, the wife and combat-in-arms of the first Soviet leader, Vladimir Lenin. in history. Why was their role of the first ladies really very important for their husbands and for their countries, Russia and Great Britain at that time?

What unites these two ladies? Not only love and commitment to their husbands. They shared every secret of their spouses. They knew what was going on, they counseled their husbands on every aspect of the political situation and the people surrounding them. They were politically involved and tried to help people of their countries and allies. They were incredibly important and it is fair to say that neither Vladimir Lenin nor Winston Churchill could have succeeded without their outstanding wives' support.

Though Nadezhda and Clementine were as different as chalk and cheese and they were not born for the role of wives of the great political leaders, they reinvented themselves because those ladies knew they had to play that role that fate had given them and they did their best when it was needed.

We believe that this is a good lesson for all of us. We can rise to the level of events if we have prepared for them properly as the characters of our essay managed to prove it.

What being the First Lady is like. Social activities of Nadezhda Krupskaya and Clementine Churchill

“No star will shine until there’s someone holding a black cloth behind” *Winston Churchill*

Where does the idea of the First Lady come from? From fairy tales and feudalism? If you are a King you need a Queen; if you are a President or Prime Minister you must have a First Lady. What does a First Lady do? Anything she likes! "The role of the First Lady is whatever the First Lady wants it to be," Laura Bush once said. Over the years, First Ladies have been managers, renovators and hostesses. More recently they have been campaigners, social activists and policy advocates.

In our essay we are going to use the term First Lady with respect to two outstanding women in history, Clementine Churchill, the wife of the British Prime-Minister, Winston Churchill and Nadezhda Krupskaya, the wife and comrade-in-arms of the famous Russian revolutionary - Vladimir Lenin. Both statesmen were extraordinary leaders, who managed to change the history of their countries-Great Britain and Russia, and consequently influenced the history of the world. But would it happen without the help of the First Ladies, their social activities and unseen support of their husbands’ leadership? We will try to answer this question.

To start with, there are certain qualities that every First Lady should have or at least be capable of learning. The best qualities of the First Lady are: to be an intercessor for her husband, the biggest supporter, a confidant, a counselor, an encourager... Last but not least, she should be able to kill the “green-eyed monster”-politicians are often being adored by the masses. The less the First Lady pays attention to this, the better for her family life and international situation because jealousy and politics do not go well together, even though some of the adorers might become too intrusive...

Besides, the First Lady should be aware of the needs of the people. When used wisely and effectively, the first lady’s social activities might be crucial for better changes in society. We all know under what circumstances Winston Churchill took office as prime minister of Britain in May 1940. Nazi Germany

had brought Continental Europe under its domination, and it seemed as if Britain would be the next. Churchill couldn't promise a miracle, he told the House of Commons: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." He forgot to mention a possibly more powerful weapon: his wife, Clementine.

As a political force Clementine Churchill often demonstrated qualities of charisma, insight and organizational skill, vital to the role of statesperson. She became her husband's essential confidante and adviser, "able to command civil servants, dress down generals, chivy cabinet ministers and face up to presidents on his behalf." She urged him to be open to social reform and women's suffrage when he returned to government; and, despite her Liberal political beliefs, comforted him when, having rejoined the Conservatives in 1924, he lost his post as chancellor of the Exchequer in the "flapper election" of 1929.

Most spectacularly, she was his support and counselor when he returned to lead the government in the darkest hour of World War II. He made her privy to top secret information, including the Ultra decrypts of Nazi codes; and in addition to acting as his sounding board for policies and speeches, she helped him deal with the U.S.A., using her charm to stimulate American participation in the anti-Nazi struggle.

A cause which has been referred to as her greatest achievement was the Red Cross Aid to Russia Fund, where she served as a Chairman in the Second World War. There was a great deal of sympathy in Great Britain for the plight of the Russian people. Clementine herself was particularly troubled by the enormous losses of the Soviet Union. The First Lady rallied support from the wealthy and celebrity musicians and sportsmen along with factory workers and school girls willing to knit scarves, gloves and hats. The Red Cross Aid to Russia Fund quickly raised £1 million in the period from mid-October to December 1941, rising to a massive £8 million by the end of the war. This went towards essential supplies such as clothing and blankets, medicine and medical equipment including X-ray installations, and first aid kits. To amass such support from a country which was itself struggling with wartime shortages was a considerable achievement.

The stunning success of the Aid to Russia Fund, owing to the generosity of the British public, was a major step for British diplomacy and was useful for difficult moments in Anglo-Soviet relations. For their part, the Soviet government was grateful to the Churchills' for such charitable efforts. It was for this reason that it decided to extend an official invitation for Clementine Churchill to tour the Soviet Union and witness, first-hand, what her fund had achieved and Stalin himself welcomed Clementine to the Kremlin, and thanked her for all her fundraising efforts. For the magnitude of her achievement with the Aid to Russia Fund, she was awarded Order of the Red Banner of Labour, a Soviet award given by the Soviet state for exceptional working achievements, as well as the Distinguished Red Cross Service Badge from the Soviet Red Cross.

As for our second character, Nadezhda Krupskaya, like many other revolutionary figures, she was a committed Bolshevik activist. She was born in 1869 to a mother who came from a family of landless Russian nobles, and a father who was a decommissioned Officer in the Russian army. She expressed an interest in education from a young age, and was particularly drawn to Tolstoy's theory of democratic education. Krupskaya began to participate in several illegal discussion circles where she studied the theories of Marx. She was an entirely committed Revolutionary by this point, which, as she later claimed, was the reason Lenin was drawn to her. 'He could never have loved a woman with whose opinions he disagreed and who was not a comrade in his work', wrote fellow Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky .

Between 1891-1896, Krupskaya worked offering evening classes on reading, writing and arithmetic. She taught illegal classes with a revolutionary influence to those students who she regarded as ready for them. She learned a lot about the workers' conditions in the factories during this time, which helped Lenin when writing his pamphlets and which she distributed to the factories. Krupskaya's emphasis was always on 'the problems of youth organisation and education', but she was also interested in the woman question. She had a lifelong love of the great Russian poet Nekrasov and her first political article entitled; 'The

Woman Worker', began with a quote from one of his poems: 'Thy lot is hard, a woman's lot. A harder lot can scarce be found.'

Krupskaya first met Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (later known as Vladimir Lenin) in 1894 as a result of her revolutionary activity; in fact, while attending a discussion group. When in 1897 Lenin was arrested for sedition and exiled for three years to Shushenskoye (2,800 miles from Moscow), Krupskaya and Ulyanov had to arrange a church marriage so she could join him as his wife. As Krupskaya later recalled about life in Siberian exile, 'we were young then, we had just got married, we loved each other passionately'.

Politically, the couple certainly kept very busy: translating books about foreign labor movements, building relationships with Western socialists, and pondering prospects for a revolution. In 1900 Nadezhda and Vladimir went to Europe where they often changed residence: Munich, London, Genève and Paris. Leon Trotsky: 'She was at the very centre of all the organisation work; she received comrades when they arrived, instructed them when they left, established connections, supplied secret addresses, wrote letters, and coded and decoded correspondence...' In 1910 Krupskaya was a co-founder of International Women's Day, which was first celebrated in Russia in 1913.

All these years Krupskaya was her husband's loyal companion. For instance, she helped in communication with other socialists by encrypting correspondence. Krupskaya and Lenin had no children and Nadezhda found consolation in social activity and believed that, "One has to know how to merge one's life with the life of society. This is not asceticism. On the contrary, the fact of this merging, the fact that the common cause of all working people becomes a personal matter, makes personal life richer."

What unites these two characters? Not only love and commitment to their husbands. They shared nearly every secret of their spouses. They knew what was going on, they counseled their husbands on every aspect of the political situation and the people surrounding them. They were incredibly important and it is fair to say that neither Vladimir Lenin nor

Winston Churchill could have succeeded without their outstanding wives' support.

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We believe that there is a lesson for all of us. We can rise to the level of events if we have prepared for them properly as the characters of our essay managed to do. Today people have different opinions on the role of these outstanding women in the lives of their famous spouses. But you cannot deny the fact that there is one thing which is permanent- they were the women of their time, dedicating all their energy, talent and education to the people they loved and the ideas they supported. You can not underestimate their contribution in the lives of their husbands and in the destiny of the people in Great Britain and Russia in the long run.

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