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Simion Koldofsky, the Friend

Emma Goldman

1936

I first met Simion Koldofsky in Moscow in 1920, during the so-called military communism. Life was cruelly hard and the struggle bitter... Russia, surrounded by four fronts, –blockaded by all the European powers –was not in the mood for sociability. In the face of hunger, epidemics and death, the life of everyone was grim and self-centered; no-one cared for the tragedy of the other.

My old pal, Alexander Berkman, and I, had been in Russia only a short time. We naturally felt the tragedy of the Revolution that was being played in the day-by-day struggle. We missed close comradeship and the fellowship that had been ours for many years in the United States. It was then that Simion Koldofsky appeared on the scene; he had come to Russia as the representative of the Joint Board. He brought help and support for thousands of Jews who at that time were even more devoid of the means of subsistence than many of the Gentiles. Koldofsky worked day and night alleviating the hunger and the misery confronting him at every step. Yet he did not overlook the needs of individual people in the welter of the mass devastation. He came to us with generous feeling and willingness, thus bringing into our lives some of the

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warmth and comradeship we had known in the past. He did more; he helps in a measure to save the health of Alexander Berkman.

My comrade became ill almost immediately after we landed in Russia. He developed ulcers of the stomach because of the black bread which he could not digest. It was necessary to find some kind of nourishment that would help to restore him to his former strong physical condition. It was our newly-found friend, Simion Koldofsky, who brought the relief. However, it was not only the material side of the assistance we received from our friend. It was more his kindness and his fellowship, which went a long way to keep up our *morale* in the first period of our experience in Russia.

It was some years before I met Simion Koldofsky again. It was at a reception given me on my return to London in '32. I did not know that my good friend was among the people who had come to greet me. When he was called upon to speak, I at once visualized our small room in Moscow and the many interesting talks we had with (Koldofsky ?) as well as the hope and cheer he had always brought with him. I was deeply moved by his fine tribute to me and my work and by the same friendliness which had not changed during 12 years.

I was living under very trying conditions in London during a bitter winter in a room that had a temperature below zero, and with all sorts of difficulties which made it extremely hard to reach people interested in my work here. It was Simion Koldofsky and his lovely wife, Lisa, who came to my rescue. They invited me to their house, as if I were flesh of their flesh and blood of their blood and they fairly lavished on me their friendship and their devotion. Both came like a ray of light from a dark sky. I had never felt acclimatized in England nor was I ever able to take root in this country. The struggle to be here was often beyond my power of endurance; but it was the devotion of my friends, Simion and Lisa, that raised my spirit many times which it was quite in the depths.

Since that time, our friendship has continued until this day without the least shadow. Always I found their home open to me, and always I returned to them as to my own.

November 1935, I again returned to England and again enjoyed the hospitality of the Koldofskys. It was during my stay there that Simion became so violently ill. Like all proletarians, he continued on his feet and at his task as a journalist until he collapsed. I felt then (as I have since) that if our friend had been in a position to give up his job, go to a southern climate and take the necessary leisure to “invite his soul,” he would now be a stronger and healthier man. But he is one of the many in our world, bound by economic necessity to work when his health is so poor. Fortunately, he is blessed with a partner in life who by her love and consecration has helped our friend over the gravest moments of his illness.

There are few people who retain their interest in others and their friendship, when they themselves are physically stricken. Most sick people are frightfully self-centered; the rest of the world and its tragedies and comedies cease to exist for them. They live in their own world, limited by their physical ailments and exclusive of the world at large.

Simion Koldofsky is among the few great exceptions, close to his sick-room, at the time when he suffered such agonies as would break the strongest will, Simion Koldofsky never ceased to be the same gracious host and friend; never permitted his own illness to exclude his concern and his interest in the desperate struggle that was going on in the outside world. For his own sake, it would be better if he quite required from his activities in the social and humanitarian world—but it would be very unlike Simion Koldofsky, whose whole life has been dedicated to the masses whose hopes and aspirations he has always shared.

The workers were never more in need of such devoted spirits as Simion Koldofsky. Time on end, they have been neglected—often betrayed—by their so-called friends and leaders. It is there-

fore inspiring to know the few who remain staunch through all the years of disappointments, disillusionments and vicissitudes.

Let us rejoice, therefore, that Simion Koldofsky has never failed the workers, never failed the social struggle for human betterment, kept up whether by Jew or gentile.

For myself, I greet Simion Koldofsky, the Friend, the Comrade, ever ready to encourage and sustain one at all times. I wish him renewed strength and complete recovery. We need you, Simion Koldofsky. We need your continued work, we need you as our Friend!