

# MARIE SETON

writes about

## "Three Songs of Lenin"



his work arouses people in the most distant parts of the Union to break the chains of tradition and begin to construct a new world. The subject overwhelms the form, though it is the best possible, a documentary film re-edited from a hundred and fifty old news-reels taken by Vertov since 1918.

Vertov, pioneer of Soviet documentary films and unique news-reel reporter, explained the principle of this reconstruction to me.

He feels that a film about Lenin should, by rights, only be made after a considerable lapse of time, because, "unless fifty years had passed it would be difficult for us to find the key to Lenin's influence."

Vertov continued, "That is why I have replaced distance in time by a distance of place. Here in Moscow the changes which have taken place since the Revolution are not completely clear because we had, and still have, a homogeneous culture and way of thought.

"But take, for instance, Turkestan. There life was extremely backward, and because of that I was able to find the tremendous influence Lenin has had upon primitive life. The unknown authors of songs gave me the key; they are so concerned with the human element, and they express only the essential things. From thousands of such songs I chose three, and from them I have made three cinema songs."

The first song is a song of love. It begins with the caption, "They loved him." Then there follows a series of shots—the birth-place of Lenin, the woods where he spent much of his time, a seat which has now become historic—impersonal things, yet very intimate in sentiment. The song then passes to Turkestan, writhing in the picturesque, but strangling chains of tradition,

a poetic squalor; then slowly the thoughts of Lenin begin to penetrate, and the force of them begins the demolition of long-established customs in religion, education and the position of women. An inactive world turns into a hive of activity.

The second song is a pictorial oration upon the death of Lenin. The main theme is his lying-in-state and the thoughts of the hundreds and thousands who passed by and remembered him as he was in life. Here are inserted sections from Vertov's earliest news-reels. This juxtaposition of the living

### WHAT H. G. WELLS TOLD VERTOV

"I HAVE had the privilege to see 'Three Songs of Lenin' before its release. It is one of the greatest and most beautiful films I have ever seen. Congratulations to Dzigo Vertov and everybody who has had to do with it. I've also seen again that great film 'Deserter.' I wish I could sit up all night seeing films like these, but Moscow has so many fascinating things to show that I am very tired, so I am going off to bed—to dream of 'Three Songs of Lenin.'"

and the dead Lenin and the procession of mourners is the most moving passage of the whole film. The sound track of this song is Siegfried's Funeral March—a triumph over death.

The third song begins with the house and the woods and the seat, intimate associations with Lenin, covered in snow—forlorn and mute testaments of grief; but grief cannot hold back the passage of thought transformed into action here, there and everywhere. Punctuating this flow of social activity is a procession of individuals from the four corners of the Soviet Union recounting change and yet further change, culminating in the return to Moscow of Schmidt's Arctic expedition.

The speed of this last part is terrific, the procession of events full of energy. In the future there may be other and greater films about Lenin, embodying a more complete historical picture, but even so the value of "Three Songs of Lenin" will increase rather than decrease with time.

LENIN is the subject of many songs in the Soviet Union, but the most moving of all are those written about him by the poets of the national minorities in central Asia. They are intimate and full of love; a love expressing itself in words perhaps for the first time. Dzigo Vertov has chosen three of these songs to form the skeleton upon which he has constructed his film, "Three Songs of Lenin," the picture about which everyone is talking in the Soviet Union.

Vertov calls his film, "a symphony of thought," but it is more than that, it is a symphony of thought translated into action. Thinking about Lenin, seeing him alive and then lying-in-state, feeling the impetus of