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The Revolt in Russia

Freedom Press, Anonymous

April, 1887

Last month's attempt to celebrate the anniversary of the execution of Alexander II. by that of his son and successor has revealed to all Europe the depth of the surging discontent now stirring among the people of Russia; the burning shame and indignation with which they see themselves crushed beneath a system of government which would have disgraced the Dark Ages.

As Leroy-Beaulieu has pointed out, Russia has been the scapegoat of Western Europe. Her people have borne the brunt of the successive tides of invasion by the savage and cruel hordes of Asia; by her brave resistance she has glutted their fury, by her industry she has satiated their greed. Thus Teuton and Kelt have been left the freer to develop their social life at the cost of the blood and the freedom of the Slav. It was this terrible task — this fate which has made her loss our gain — which checked the natural and promising development of Russia centuries ago. It is this service which she has rendered to Europe which has saddled her even down to to-day with the incubus of Eastern despotism: a despotism which in the nineteenth century calls it a crime for the men of one of the most intelligent and social races in the world to speak or write

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Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 1, No. 7, online
source RevoltLib.com, retrieved on May 1, 2020.

Freedom Press, London

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what they think, to live as they please, or to perform the simplest action on their own initiative.

It is only within the last thirty or forty years that the Russian nation has begun to recover from the agony of its long martyrdom:

Only for little more than twenty years that the educated classes have begun to feel their oneness with the masses of the people, and to join hands with them in a serious effort for deliverance.

This struggle, brief as it has been, has shown the revival of the old Slavonic spirit of daring and self-devotion, and won the admiring respect of every generous spirit in the civilized world. For the odds are desperate, and the people are roused to consciousness of their wrongs and of their hopes only by a succession of deeds of the most splendid heroism, and the sacrifice of thousands of the noblest lives in Russia.

The Czar is the figure-head of an utterly corrupt bureaucracy, which chokes every possibility of natural social development; and therefore against him and his lackeys is arrayed, openly or secretly, every partizan of free thought or free action throughout the country, whether he be Socialist or social reformer, or merely a political Liberal desiring parliamentary institutions. At the present moment Alexander III. would appear to be assailed by an outbreak of discontent in every shape and form.

The Central Executive Committee of the Terrorist party, who killed Alexander II., seem to have taken no active part in the attempt this year. It was made by three Petersburg students, Andreyovskiy, Petroff, and Generaloff, who belonged to a distinct terrorist group. In fact, such separate groups, either for the purpose of carrying on direct warfare with the Government, or for propagandist work among the people, have sprung up all over Russia. The last number of the *Messenger of the Will of the People* mentions about a dozen lithographed or printed newspapers, pamphlets, manifestos, etc., issued by as many different organizations. It was found that time was lost and energy wasted in waiting for orders from a common center; and the revolutionary movement, in Russia as else-

where, as it grows and increases in strength and size, gives larger and larger scope to individual initiative and local freedom of action.

The attempt to assassinate the Czar was accompanied by a number of outbreaks among peasants and workmen in various parts of the country, which would seem to have been immediately put down, but all news about them has been suppressed. The considerable number of arrests among workmen, however, shows how rapidly the Socialistic side of the movement is spreading in the towns, in spite of Tolstoy's Bismarkian social "reforms."

The more political aspect of Russian discontent is represented by the conspiracy just discovered among the Liberals. The conspirators, whose motto is "The People, with the Czar or against the Czar," issue a lithographed paper, *The Constitutional*, setting forth the political and economic views of Western Europe as exemplified in the leading authors. They aim at forcing the Czar to abdicate or grant a constitution. This is the party of landowners, country nobility, and the middle-class.

Besides these Terrorists, Socialists, and Liberals, the autocracy is beset by a considerable military conspiracy, in which the very guards who watch the palace doors are implicated.

No wonder that the Anitchkoff Palace is undermined with secret passages containing sand-covered drums to reveal the faintest vibration, like a besieged fortress. No wonder that the gloomy and brutal despot, who chooses to make himself responsible for the ruin and destruction of thousands of better lives than his own every year, sneaks in Gatchina in terror for his life. No wonder that his underlings are arresting by hundreds nobles, officials, soldiers, traders, students, peasants, workmen, men and women alike ; closing institutes and colleges ; prohibiting afresh all voluntary associations and meetings ; hanging officers in their barracks and prisoners in the fortress, and beating young girls until they are insensible. Such deeds and such precautions are the last orgy of power, the last exhibition of the cowardly terror of men who feel their authority slipping through their fingers.

Vladimir, the Czar's brother, "as great a scoundrel as any man in Russia," is to head the Committee of Investigation into the revolutionary movement. He will be troubled with no scruples as to the means of extorting avowals from his prisoners, and it will be well if the official exhibition of sentiment about the supposed torture inflicted by Bulgarian Regents be extended to a practical check upon such barbarities at home.

Meanwhile, the amiable Alexander has dissolved the Commission which was inquiring into abuses and drawing up a plan of reforms (there is always a Commission or so inquiring and drawing up plans in Russia, but nothing ever comes of it), and is said to meditate making the chief of police his Prime Minister. Effects in the shape of insurrection and conspiracy are produced without a cause worth investigating or removing, he thinks, and since whips have not sufficed he proposes to chastise his unhappy people with scorpions.

May he all the sooner lash them into universal and successful revolt ; revolt which will fling him and his bureaucracy into the Limbo where the memory of departed tyrannies withers in the contempt of mankind.