

# Long live tyrannicide!

Johann Most

1881

«*Grab this one, grab that one; one will reach you.*» C. Beck

Triumph! Triumph! The poet's words have come true. One of the most hideous tyrants in Europe, whose downfall had long been promised and who, in a fit of vengeance, had countless heroes and heroines of the Russian people destroyed or imprisoned — the Emperor of Russia is no more.

Last Sunday at noon, when the monster was returning from one of those entertainments that usually consist of a feast for the eyes with well-drilled herds of stupid blood and iron slaves, and which are called military reviews, the beast caught up with the judges of the people who had long since pronounced their death sentence and disposed of them with a strong hand.

This scoundrel had succeeded in touching the boundary stone between this world and the next with his coat sleeve five times; and this time he was once again about to babble about the "finger of God" which had once again saved his damned life when the fist of the people had shut him up forever.

One of those bold young men produced by the Russian Social Revolutionary movement, Rousakoff<sup>1</sup> — we speak his name with respect — had thrown a dynamite bomb under the despot's car, which caused great devastation to the vehicle and its immediate vicinity, but left the crowned robber and murderer unharmed.

Michaelevich, a princely general, and others immediately fell upon the noble executor of the people's will, but the latter drew a dagger with one hand against the autocrat's face and with the other hand directed the barrel of a revolver against his chest. He was disarmed in an instant; and the Emperor's entourage, bedraggled, and thoroughly corrupt, breathes a sigh of relief at the supposedly averted danger. Then a new bomb flies towards him; this time it falls at the feet of the despot, smashes his legs, tears open his stomach and causes numerous injuries and deaths among the military and civilian Cossacks standing around.

The people in the scene are as if paralyzed, only the energetic bomb thrower does not lose his composure and is lucky enough to escape. The Emperor, however, is dragged to his palace,

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolaj Ivanovio Rysakov (1861–1881) was arrested, repented of his crime during the trial and died on the scaffold. The second bomb was thrown by Ignatij Ioakimovio Grinevickij, a student at the Technological Institute, who died of his injuries on the day of the assassination.

where he is able to reflect on his life of crimes for an hour and a half, in terrible pain. Finally he dies. This is the simple fact.

In an instant the telegraph wires were broadcast to the most remote corners of the earth to make the result known throughout the world. The effect of this publication was as varied as it was drastic. Like a clap of thunder, it penetrated the princely palaces, where those guilt-ridden spawn of all wickedness dwell, who have long since deserved a similar fate a thousand times over.

For three years, many a bullet has whizzed past the ears of these monsters without harming a hair on their heads – apart from Nobile's shotgun blast<sup>2</sup>. Again and again they have been able to “royally” compensate themselves for the horror they have endured through executions and mass reprimands of all kinds. Indeed, they have recently been whispering to each other with pleasure that all danger is over because they have succeeded in eradicating the most energetic of all tyrant haters, the Russian “nihilists”, down to the last member. Here comes a hit like that!

Wilhelm, the former grapeshot prince of Prussia, the current Protestant pope and soldier emperor of Germany, literally had convulsions with excitement. Similar things happened at other courts. Weeping and gnashing of teeth reigned in every residential nest.

But the rest of the rabble that pulls the wires of the ruling classes' government mechanism in various countries also felt a tremendous “moral” hangover and burst into tears of condolence – whether they consisted of simple lackeys on the steps of an imperial throne or first-class “republican” bandits of order.

The whining was no less in France, Switzerland and America than in Montenegro or Greece.

A Gambetta<sup>3</sup> forced the adjournment of the chambers and thus inflicted a disgrace on France from which even Austria was saved by the current President of the Reichsrat.

Public opinion is taken aback and looks in vain for reasons for such a miserable attitude. One thinks of diplomatic motives and the like; but one is wrong.

There may well have been some things here and there that look like simple political hypocrisy; in the main the reasons lie deeper.

The representatives of the ruling classes see in the destruction of an autocrat more than just the act of killing. They are faced with a successful attack on authority as such. At the same time, they all know that every success has the wonderful power not only to inspire respect, but also to inspire imitation. So they are simply trembling from Constantinople to Washington for their long-lost heads.

This horror is a great delight for us, just as we heard with the most joyful feelings about the heroic deed of those social revolutionaries in St. Petersburg who slaughtered a tyrant last Sunday.

In this time of the most general dejection and melancholy, in a period when in many countries only old women and children, with tears in their eyes and the most disgusting fear of the rod of the state night watchmen in their bodies, hobble around the political stage; Now that real heroes have become so rare, such a brutal act has the effect of a refreshing storm on better natures.

Some may say that we are “playing with nihilists,” others may call us cynics or brutal; we know that in expressing our joy at the successful deed, we were not only revealing our own feelings,

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<sup>2</sup> On June 2, 1878, Karl Eduard Nobile attempted to assassinate Kaiser Wilhelm II with a shotgun.

<sup>3</sup> Léon Gambetta (1838–1882) played a leading role in French political life as a radical deputy and opponent of the Second Empire.

but expressing what millions of oppressed and tyrannized people thought with us when they read of Alexander's execution.

Of course, it will happen again that here and there even socialists will appear who, without being asked, will assure you that they, for their part, abhor regicide because it is of no use and because they are fighting not people but institutions.

This sophistry is so crude that it can be disgraced in a single sentence. It is obvious even to a political ABC student that state and social institutions cannot be abolished until the people who want to maintain them have been defeated. Mere philosophy will not chase a sparrow away from a cherry tree, any more than bees can get rid of their drones by simply buzzing. On the other hand, it is quite wrong to say that the destruction of a prince is of no value because a predetermined substitute will immediately take his place.

The only thing that one could lament is the rarity of so-called tyrannicide. If only one crown villain were to be put down every month, in a short time no one would be happy to play the role of a monarch any more.

Furthermore, it is certainly a satisfaction for every fair-minded person when such a capital criminal is put down, i.e. punished in accordance with his crimes. It does not occur to the lawyers of civil society not to hang a murderer or to imprison a thief, because it has been proven that these punishments do not eliminate murder and theft (also institutions of this society). When one is dealing with a subject such as Alexander Romanov, one must accept his destruction with doubly satisfaction.

If one could believe the newspaper writers, one would have to assume from their chatter that the deposed Tsar was a true model of goodness of heart. The facts prove that he was one of the worst atrocities that ever defiled humanity. Around 100,000 people were exiled to Siberia during his reign, dozens were hanged after having endured the most horrific torture. The Russian crown Moloch demanded all these victims simply because the people concerned were striving for the improvement of society, wished for the general good — perhaps they had only passed on a single forbidden book or written a letter criticising the government.

Of the war horrors that this tyrant conjured up, we will only take one scene from the last Turkish war<sup>4</sup>. Alexander celebrated his name day and wished for a warlike spectacle. He ordered an assault on Plevna; the generals dared to point out that such an assault would not only fail, but would also cost a huge number of people. In vain! The order remained; and in order to be able to watch the slaughter with more comfort, the tyrant had his own stage built with a kind of imperial box, from where he could observe the storm without being in danger himself. The result was in line with the generals' predictions. The storm was repelled, and 8,000 dead and wounded covered the ground outside the walls of Plevna. But the "Little Father", as the despot liked to be called, had amused himself cannibalistically.

All requests, all wishes for the introduction of even the most insignificant reforms, which were laid at his feet almost daily, were answered only by new vile acts of Asiatic governmental barbarism. Every warning or threat was followed by veritable dragonades. Attempted but unsuccessful attacks on his person increased his villainy to monstrous proportions.

Who is scoundrel enough to really lament the death of such a beast? But they say: will the successor of the shattered one do better than he? We do not know. But we do know that he will hardly be able to rule for long if he follows in his father's footsteps.

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to the war of 1877–1878, the consequences of which led to the Congress of Berlin.

Yes, we would like to hope that it will happen, for we hate hypocritical, pseudo-liberal monarchs no less than despots sans phrase, because the former are perhaps even more capable of holding back the development of culture than the latter. Moreover, the new Tsar's adherence to the old principle of government must immediately double and triple the number of enemies of the old, because there are a lot of people in Russia who have believed in the legend of the crown prince, common in all countries and at all times, according to which the heir to the throne is only waiting for the moment when he can pour out a cornucopia of happiness on the people. All these enthusiasts are immediately converted when they see that the new ukase smells just as much of Russian russia as the old ones.

However, whatever the case, it was a good one! And we hope that it was not the last.

May the bold act, which — we repeat — has our full sympathy, inspire the revolutionaries far and wide with new courage. Remember each of the words of Herwegh<sup>5</sup>:

*“And where there are still tyrants,  
Let us boldly seize them;  
We have loved long enough,  
And now we want to hate!”*

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<sup>5</sup> With his stirring verses, Georg Herwegh (1817–1875) was one of the pioneers of the revolution of 1848, in which he also sought to intervene.

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Leading article in the “Freiheit” Vol.III (1881), No. 12 (March 19), p. 1, edited by Most, under the title: “Finally!” The starting point is the successful assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander II. The authorship of Most, who largely wrote his leading articles himself, is also easily recognizable linguistically.

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