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When You Are Scared, It Is Better to Remain Silent

Mikola Dziadok

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Ever since the events in Arkhangelsk, I have been waiting for the decent Russian media to publish a sensible portrait-cum-analysis of the new would-be member of the People's Will, Mikhail Zhlobitsky, who blew himself up at the local FSB office. My wait is over. *Novaya Gazeta* has published an article about him. It is a vile, shameful article, which I might have expected from anyone else, but not from *Novaya Gazeta*. Every quotation you can pull from the article, not to mention the conclusion, is a specimen of feeble-mindedness compounded by fear.

“Unfortunately, now many people could come to regard [Zhlobitsky] as an icon, a martyr, a hero.”

That “unfortunately” tipped me off to the fact that nothing good lay ahead.

“Perovskaya and Zasulich: their forgotten names still grace street signs marking alleys.¹ Strictly speaking, nearly every

¹ *Translator's Note. While there are a couple of dozen Sophia Perovskaya Streets extant in post-Soviet Russia, there seems to be only one Vera Zasulich Street—in Perm.*

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municipality [*in Russia*] is thus guilty of excusing terrorism. Their ‘heroic deeds’ have never been duly judged. So, they have returned: a second-year student at a vocational college assembles a bomb at home in the evenings from available materials.”

Thanks to Sophia Perovskaya, Vera Zasulich, and people like them, people whom *Novaya Gazeta*’s reporter [*Tatyana Britskaya*] considers reprehensible, Russia overthrew the tsarist autocracy, a realm in which the reporter’s great-grandfathers were whipped for not doffing their hats in the presence of their masters and were dispatched as cannon fodder to distant lands for the Empire’s glory. That was only a small fraction of the woes visited upon the heads of the common folk. The reporter, however, is still sad that streets are named after these heroines and heroes, and she brackets their heroic deeds in quotation marks.

“However, the three Arkhangelsk Chekists [*sic*] wounded by shrapnel were unlikely to be directly involved in the torture about which Mikhail Zh. wrote [*in his farewell message on Telegram*].”

This is really a masterpiece. According to the reporter, only a tiny group of FSB officers, a group that exists only in her head, has been involved in torture. All other FSB officers wear white gloves, compose poems, dance at balls, and have preventive discussions with schoolchildren, urging them not to become “extremists.” They also catch drug barons and ISIS fighters, interrogating them solely by looking at them sternly. Apparently, the reporter has forgotten about “repeat interrogations using an electrical memory aid” and the complaints by cops (!) accused of corruption that they were tortured by FSB officers. The reporter must think that Zhlobitsky should have first approached [*the three FSB officers he wounded*] and asked them, “Do you torture people by any chance? No? Well, okay, then, I’ll go blow up somebody else.”

“Apparently, we never were able to assess or correct mistakes, and now history is taking us back for another go-round. This is facilitated quite readily by the fact that adults notice unhappy, con-

fused children only when the latter perish while activating home-made infernal machines.”

What mistakes is she talking about? She is not condemning the butchers of the NKVD or the enslavement of entire nations, first by Imperial Russia, then by the Soviet empire. No, the “mistakes” were the members of the nobility who were among the organizers of the People’s Will and the members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, people who died martyrs’ deaths to liberate their own people from bondage.

Because reading it only provokes disgust, there is not pointing in parsing this libel any further. I would only note that the reporter is *Novaya Gazeta*’s [*Arctic Circle*] correspondent, meaning she is a local reporter. This, apparently, is the reason for her condescending, judgmental tone and her attempt to turn a hero into a “confused child.” If you write too bluntly, you have unexploded FSB officers to deal with, as well as their colleagues and relatives. But she has keep working and get comments from the security service when she needs them. So, she will continue putting a good face on a bad game, denouncing “violence of any kind.” My ass.

It is true what they say: scratch a Russian liberal and, deep down, you will find a statist and conservative. You want to live in a just society, but you think it can be achieved by pickets and petitions. You want the regime to respect you, but you condemn people who force it to respect them. You want freedom, but you are afraid to take it. You condemn the bravest people, thus projecting an image of victims, not fighters. In today’s stinking Russia, ninety-nine percent of you will end up hightailing it abroad. But not everyone has the opportunity, you know?

So, if you are scared, it is better to remain silent than to yap encouragingly at the butchers, who, for a change, suffered for their crimes.

I would like to emphasize I do not consider individual insurgency an acceptable or proper means of political militancy, nor would I advise anyone to engage in it. I believe everyone has the right to

live, even a fucking FSB officer. But not everyone can adhere to the same beliefs I do while living amidst a terrorist dictatorship. I understand such people perfectly well, too.