

Fascist attacks in Moscow

Patrick Richter
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During the evening of October 30, around 300 skinheads armed with wooden clubs and iron bars launched a vicious attack on Tsaritsyno market in the south of Moscow. They assaulted dozens of stallholders, most of whom originate from the southern regions of the former Soviet Union. Following their initial attack, about 100 skinheads then entered the subway station near the market—lashing out at passers-by and those using the tube. They got off one station further on and then attacked Afghan refugees residing in the Hotel Sevastopol. Some of those assaulted suffered life threatening injuries.

As a result of the pogrom two died immediately—a 35 and a 37-year-old from Azerbaijan—with an 18-year-old youth from Tajikistan dying later on November 5 from head wounds. More than 20 other victims were treated in hospital.

Politicians, police and the media immediately attempted to write off the assaults as the hooligan acts of football fans, noting that Russian citizens had also been subject to attack. One day after the attacks the head of the Local Administration for Internal Affairs (GUVd), Major General Vladimir Pronin, said that the youth involved were fanatical supporters of the Moscow football team, Spartak, who had been unable to “give vent to their emotions” following the defeat Saturday of their team in a match against the Zenit team from St. Petersburg.

Eyewitnesses and even police reports make clear, however, that the youth involved were neo-fascists. Many members of the group had shaved heads and bore badges proclaiming allegiance to the extreme right-wing Russian National Unity (RNU).

Many witnesses concluded that the extent and the deliberate nature of the armed attack pointed to its having been planned.

“What I saw didn’t look like a spontaneous act,” said Valera, 27, who asked not to use his last name. “The attackers were dressed in uniform. Somebody probably organised it; at least it seems to me that it was well planned-beforehand. How could it be that in the space of three minutes they could make such a mess, breaking glass and kicking people down? Believe me, that wasn’t just a mob.”

Anna Mazhuga, director of the Anti-Fascist Youth Movement, stated, “I can’t say whether this attack was planned beforehand, but these people don’t generally act on their own. They have well-organised groups.”

According to the GUVd there are around 2,000 active and organised neo-fascists who have loose links to a further 25,000

extreme rightists. Neo-fascist attacks have increased recently. On April 20, the birthday of Adolf Hitler, around 150 skinheads attacked a food market, manned largely by traders from the Caucasus, in the Moscow district of Yassenovo. Ten people were injured. On the same day a Chechen youth was stabbed in the centre of Moscow and then in May an African student was stabbed in the subway. On November 3, just four days after the latest attack, a further assault by 150 skinheads on another Moscow market was only averted at the last moment.

As a matter of course, politicians and police deny the real political background to such attacks, claiming that they are of a purely criminal nature. Such attacks are then used to intensify the building up of the state apparatus.

Although a spokesman for the police stated that they know the names of all those involved in the attack on the market in Tsaritsyno, just 25 have been arrested. The state attorney has charged them with murder and “rowdiness”, according to paragraphs 105 and 213 of Russian law. The paragraph referring to “incitement to nationalist discord”, however, is not to be applied.

The chairman of the Duma party, Unity, Vladimir Pekhtin, reacted with the demand for an increase in the budget for security structures and his proposal met with broad support. Russian President Vladimir Putin reacted in similar fashion, but only five days after the attacks. He commissioned the interior minister to take measures to ensure there is no repetition of such “negative extremist deeds”.

Russian politics has systematically prepared the basis for such disturbances by neo-fascists, the most extensive violent attacks of their type since the pogroms against Jews in the days of the Tsar.

Following the collapse the Soviet Union, a plethora of fascist and nationalist organisations emerged which were openly encouraged and incited by leading politicians and state bodies.

Prominent examples are the notorious Russian National Unity (RNU), led by Alexander Barkashov. For years the largest openly fascist organisation in Russia was running training camps in the city’s Teletsky park, with the toleration of the Moscow authorities. At the camps, thousands of skinheads and neo-nazis are trained in military techniques. Officially the organisation had a contract for the “supervision of the parks.”

Leading politicians and state officials regularly use disparaging language, largely out of use since the times of the

Tsar, to describe non-Russian nationalities. Citizens from the Ukraine and the Caucasus, Jews, Tatars, those of Asian origin and citizens of the central Asian republics are treated with contempt along the lines of former great Russian chauvinism, and—as in the case of Chechnya—made responsible for the current social crisis.

Those coming from the Russian regions of the northern Caucasus - Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia or Kabardino-Balkaria—as well as the former Soviet republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia or Uzbekistan—are amongst those who have suffered most from the collapse of the Soviet economy. With unemployment in some regions reaching eighty percent, large numbers have been plunged into the worst extremes of poverty. Many have been thrown back to forms of subsistence economy, forced to produce their own food on any land that is available.

Many regard their last hope as leaving the regions in which they live in favour of the big Russian cities, where they attempt to find work and some sort of income selling fruit and vegetables. Moscow in particular has proved to be a pole of attraction. Currently over eighty percent of all Russian financial transactions are concluded there and the general standard of living far exceeds that of any other Russian city and region.

In terms of domestic politics, a virtual state of war has been declared, in particular, against all those whose dark skin or hair distinguishes them from local Russians. These migrants are described as “blacks” and are virtually deprived of all civic rights and used as scapegoat for any and every mishap. During Soviet times there existed regulations governing the movement of people who attempted to come to Moscow, but regulations by the Moscow state administration under its mayor Yuri Lushkov have intensified and tightened up, especially for those groups suffering discrimination. Discussion over additional discriminatory measures against Caucasian citizens continued right up until the latest attacks.

Officially non-Moscow inhabitants are only allowed to remain in the city for three days before registering with the authorities. Any extension of a permit to stay is only agreed to when the applicant can show a return ticket, specifying exactly when he plans to leave. Registration is only possible in the first place for those who can prove they have their own flat or are accommodated in a hotel.

The so-called “blacks” are the main victims of arbitrary suppression by the police. At virtually any subway station or main street in the capital, it is possible to observe police deliberately checking and controlling “blacks” and demanding on-the-spot fines for the slightest offence. Whoever is unable to pay is taken to the police station and then has to be bailed out by relatives or acquaintances. Frequently those arrested are brutalised by the police.

Since the financial crisis of August 1998, which led to the impoverishment of broad layers of the population and Putin’s ascendancy to the presidency, the situation has worsened

considerably. In the name of a “dictatorship of law”, the government in the Kremlin has undertaken a major lurch to the right in terms of domestic policies. Police-state methods have been made the basis for a new principle of government and the ruling elite consciously evokes great Russian chauvinism.

An important milestone was the war in Chechnya. The devastating bombing attacks carried out in late summer 1999 in Moscow and other Russian cities, which killed over 300 people, were used to create a climate of fear and intimidation. There is still no clarity today regarding the identity of those responsible for the attacks. Although there were indications that the Russian secret service was involved in planting the bombs, Chechen terrorists were immediately blamed by the authorities—so justifying the Russian invasion of Chechnya. At the time Putin made clear his intentions in the most vulgar manner: In the “struggle against terrorism”, he announced: “we will roast the terrorists out of the toilets they are hiding in.”

Parallel to the bombing incidents, measures were undertaken to curtail the freedom of the press. In the name of the “fight against the oligarchs” and persons such as Vladimir Gussinski or Boris Berezovsky, who had established powerful media empires, press and other media were increasingly brought under the control of the government. This campaign was accompanied by systematic intimidation against journalists such as Andrei Babitzky or Anna Politkovskaya, who had published devastating material regarding the activities of the Russian army in Chechnya.

Putin regarded the reaction by the US government to the events of September 11 as a confirmation of his course. Already, just a few hours after the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, he said he had, “already warned the Americans two years ago of the danger of international terrorism ... They did not listen to us, however.” Intensified repression against “Chechen terrorists” was immediately put on the agenda.

This is the background that has facilitated the growth of neo-fascist and racist tendencies.



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