

Anti-immigrant pogroms in Moscow

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A racist mob of several thousand people rioted for hours on Sunday in the Moscow district of West Biryulevo. State authorities responded on Monday by conducting their own raids against immigrants, arresting hundreds.

The riots are a direct result of the reactionary policies of the Kremlin and the media's racist propaganda, which seek to divert mounting social tensions into right-wing channels.

The pogroms began on Sunday after rumors spread that a man from the Caucasus stabbed and killed 25-year-old Yegor Shcherbakov last Thursday. The rumor about the ethnicity of the offender was based on testimony by the victim's friend, who said the perpetrator "looked like someone who had travelled by train from the Caucasus." Police have since arrested 31-year-old Orchan Zeynalov from Azerbaijan.

On Saturday night, rioters overturned and destroyed several cars in the district after rumors circulated that the alleged murderer was a taxi driver.

On Sunday afternoon, far-right forces called a demonstration. In contrast to the norm at political protests, the police contingent was extremely modest at the start. Within a short period of time, hundreds and eventually thousands of people gathered. Involved in the riots were not only members of right-wing parties and notoriously nationalist football hooligans, but also a contingent of local residents.

A group of drunken right-wing extremists stormed and demolished the shopping center Biryusa. They chanted slogans such as "Russia for the Russians" and "Russian forward", and tossed a smoke bomb. The mob marched through the streets of the neighborhood, shattered shop windows, and attacked immigrants they found on the street.

Later in the evening, a crowd of 2,000 men attacked a vegetable market where many immigrants are employed. They laid waste to the entire locale.

Only starting at eight o'clock did police and security forces intervene, detaining around 380 people. Up to 72 were set free on Monday. Serious charges have been laid against just two people, with others to appear in court for minor offenses.

A total of 23 people were injured, although it is not clear how many were immigrants, right-wing thugs, or policemen. Eight were still in hospital on Monday.

Anti-foreigner protests also took place on Monday, but there was no repeat of the previous day's riots.

This is the second time this year that racism has erupted in mass violence in Russia. In July, riots and demonstrations against Chechens occurred in Pugachev in southern Russian. In December 2010, right-wing extremists also rioted in several Russian cities.

In recent years, the Kremlin has intensified and expanded its anti-immigrant policies. This summer large scale raids were carried out in Moscow and the surrounding region, in which police arrested thousands of immigrants and incarcerated them in camps. The Russian government plans to build a network of labor camps for migrant workers.

The Federal Migration Service (FMS) regularly conducts raids against immigrant, working together with fascist groups. The establishment of vigilante outfits has also been systematically promoted in recent months.

The main reason for the growing campaign against Muslim migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia is the enormous social tension in the country. According to a report by the Swiss bank Credit Suisse, the gap between the broad mass of the population and the super-rich in Russia is more pronounced than in any other major country in the world. The country's economy is now in recession, and the social crisis is being exacerbated by the austerity policies of the Kremlin.

Under these conditions, a chorus of bourgeois

politicians and organizations try to make Muslim immigrants scapegoats for the social crisis. They seek to intimidate the entire working class with pogroms.

The press, politicians and government bodies have responded to the pogroms with barely concealed consent. Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev instructed the police to step up their persecution of immigrants rather than the ultra right. Shortly after freeing many of the rightists on Monday, the Moscow police once again carried out raids against immigrants.

On Monday, the editor of the liberal press *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* Konstantin Remtschukow wrote a commentary in which he embraced the argument of the extreme right and argued that the authorities and political leaders have failed to pursue “criminal” immigrants and defend the “lives and health of Moscow citizens”.

Liberal opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who is a darling of the Western media, started a petition on Monday demanding a visa regime for citizens from Central Asia and the Caucasus. The stated aim of the campaign is to stop the immigration of workers from the region.

Earlier this year, Navalny welcomed the pogroms in Pugachev. He has participated on several occasions in the extreme right-wing Russian March.

A representative of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is closely tied to the state and is one of the most vicious propagandists against Muslims and immigrants, supported the right-wing mob, calling for “severe punishment” for the murderer of Shcherbakov.

“The people have a right to expect the criminals will be punished. And in this, as in many similar cases, when a murder is characterized by extraordinary cynicism and challenges moral and cultural norms then the punishment must be particularly hard, relentless and demonstrative.”

Leading Russian pseudo-leftists have joined in the chorus of racism. The National-Bolshevik Eduard Limonov, who sits in the leading body of the so-called “Left Forum”, said on Sunday that the cause of the pogroms was those “who bring immigrants into this country”.

“Ordinary citizens have to fend for themselves in Biryulevo”, he added.

Boris Kagarlitsky, a key figure among the Russian pseudo-left, sought to present the pogroms as some sort

of legitimate social protest. “I am surprised that after the events in Biryulevo a political motive is being sought and the nationalist version of a mob of patriots is accepted... one could also see the attack on the vegetable market as an expression of the struggle for social justice.”



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