

Russian federal investigators review anti-Semitic conspiracy theory about murder of the Tsarist family

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A Russian federal investigation, opened in 2015 into the killing of the Tsarist family by the Soviet government in 1918, will now take up the veracity of a fascistic and anti-Semitic conspiracy theory which presents the execution as a “ritual killing.” For almost a century, this argument has been the stock-in-trade of the anti-Semitic far-right and fascist forces throughout Europe, which have presented the Russian Revolution as the outcome of a “Jewish conspiracy.”

A senior investigator of the Russian Federal Investigative Committee, Marina Molodtsova, declared at a press conference on November 27 that the agency “plans to appoint psychological-historical legal expertise” to investigate “the possibility that the murder of the Tsarist family had the character of a ritual killing.” The press conference was attended by a delegation from the Russian Orthodox Church, which is headed by the Patriarch Kirill, the highest priest of the Church.

The Russian Federal Investigation Committee has already reviewed the “ritual killing” theory twice, in the mid-1990s and in the late-2000s. It was debunked both times. The Russian Orthodox Church has refused to acknowledge the findings and has continued to press for a reopening of the case and an investigation of this conspiracy theory.

According to Molodtsova, the Committee is now in the process of forming “an expert council,” which would comprise not only members of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the universities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, historians and archivists, but also priests of the Russian Orthodox Church. In this latest reopening of the case, the commission has worked together with the Russian Orthodox Church--a hotbed of anti-Semitism, Russian chauvinism and fascist theories--on a scale that is hitherto unprecedented.

At the same conference, the bishop Tikhon Shevkunov, who is rumored to be the confessor of Russian President Vladimir Putin, said: “We are treating the ritual killing theory with the utmost seriousness. Moreover, a significant part of the church has no doubts that this is precisely what happened.”

There can be no mistake about what is going on: Amid a profound political and economic crisis, the Russian state is involved in a systematic effort to legitimize and propagate fascist and anti-Semitic attacks on the October Revolution. The announcement by Molodtsova came just a few days after the airing of an anti-Semitic slander film about Leon Trotsky that was shown on Russia’s most widely watched, state-owned Channel 1. (See: Russian television’s Trotsky serial: A degraded spectacle of historical falsification and anti-Semitism)

The fraud of “ritual killings” is an old anti-Semitic prejudice, dating back to the Middle Ages. The so-called blood libel purports that Jews kidnapped and killed Christian children to drink their blood for Jewish religious rituals. This was used as the pretext for countless pogroms in early modern Europe and in the final stages of the Russian Empire.

Tsar Nikolai II, toppled in the February Revolution of 1917, threw the weight of his entire government and state machinery behind the pogromist and anti-Semitic Black Hundreds. A man of extraordinary ignorance and bigotry, Nikolai II made every effort to propagate the anti-Semitic and ignorant idea of “ritual killings” in the Beilis Trial of 1913, in which Mendeleyev Beilis, a simple Jewish worker from a factory in Kiev, was falsely accused of having murdered a little boy in a “ritual murder.” In one of the most shameful and grotesque show trials of history, Beilis had to spend over 26 months in prison, while the real murderers of the boy, who had actually confessed the

crime, were used as witnesses in the trial.

The Beilis Trial discredited the Tsarist family and the Russian government as a whole both at home and abroad. Thousands of workers, educated by the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), read about this show trial, based on the most primitive and backward lies, with increasing fury. The case was so preposterous and obviously fraudulent that even the jurors, handpicked by the government and drawn from the most backward and prejudiced layers of the peasantry, could not help but find Beilis not guilty.

In a commentary for the social democratic *Die Neue Zeit*, Leon Trotsky wrote in November 1913: “In the Kiev ritual murder trial, the government has publicly revealed not only its boundless perfidy but also its weakness.... The Kiev trial has revealed the unbridgeable gulf between this monarchy of the Black Hundreds and all historically viable social classes and has made both sides look into the depth of the abyss that separates them. In this way, the trial has ...transformed itself into a historical fact which is the harbinger of a new epoch of profound revolutionary upheavals.”

Four years later, the Bolsheviks took power in Petrograd.

The charge that the execution of the Tsarist family was a “ritual murder” originated in the anti-Semitic propaganda of the supporters of the Tsar who desperately tried to overthrow the new workers’ state. In the midst of their bloody struggle against the fledgling Soviet regime and its Red Army, the Whites undertook an “investigation” into the execution of the Tsarist family. The findings of this “investigation” were published in a book that was authored by General Mikhail Dikhterikhs, one of the most right-wing, cruel and backward generals, first of the Tsarist Army and then of the Whites.

His main “finding” was that the execution of the Tsarist family was a “ritual murder.” Bound up with this was the idea that the Bolshevik seizure of power was part of a Jewish conspiracy to rule Russia. Dikhterikhs went on to fight the Red Army until the very end of the Civil War in 1922, in what he called a religious crusade against Bolshevism. Anti-Semitic propaganda like this played a key role in mobilizing local ultra-right and nationalist forces against the Red Army. In what were the greatest anti-Jewish massacres in European history before the Nazi Holocaust, at least 150,000 Jews were killed in horrific and bloody pogroms, above all in what is now Ukraine. Countless women were raped and hundreds of thousands of children were turned into orphans.

The Whites were eventually defeated by the Red Army, but their theories lived on and found bloody expression with the Nazi movement that came to power in 1933. A crucial element in Nazi ideology was the conception of the 1917 Revolution, and of the Marxist movement in general, as part of a “Jewish conspiracy.” Adolf Hitler and Alfred Rosenberg, one of the main Nazi ideologues, had in fact been heavily influenced by the theories of the Russian White emigres.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler wrote, in 1925: “In Russian Bolshevism, we have to recognize [erblicken] the attempt undertaken by Jewry in the 20th century to assume world domination.” In 1935, his propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels described “Bolshevism” as “the declaration of war by Jewish-led international subhumans against culture itself.” The blood libel was also a frequent component of the anti-Semitic rants in Julius Streicher’s Nazi paper *Der Stürmer*.

On the basis of the bogeyman of “Jewish Bolshevism,” the Nazis and the Wehrmacht leadership were able to mobilize fascist forces throughout the occupied Soviet territories and Eastern Europe, especially starting with the Nazi assault on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. The result was the most horrific genocide in history, the murder of some 6 million European Jews, including about 1.5 million Jews in the former Soviet Union. The war waged by the Nazi regime against the USSR as a whole claimed the lives of at least 27 million Soviet citizens and devastated large parts of the European part of the country.

Enmeshed in a historical crisis and terrified by the legacy and reemerging appeal of the October Revolution, the Russian oligarchy now seeks to embolden and strengthen fascist forces on a hitherto unprecedented scale. There can hardly be a greater indictment of the results of the destruction of the Soviet Union at the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy and of the Putin regime that has emerged from it.



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