

Nine dead, twenty-one injured in Russian school shooting

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A school shooting in Kazan, the capital city of the Republic of Tatarstan in southwestern Russia, has left at least nine people dead, among them seven children. Eighteen children and three adults were hospitalized, at least two in critical condition.

The shooter, 19-year old Ilnaz Galyaviev, entered School No. 175 Tuesday morning, armed with an assault rifle. He forced his way into the building, shooting and wounding an elderly man who served as a guard. He then went on to shoot six children and two teachers, one of whom was just 25 years old. Two children jumped to their death when trying to flee. Earlier reports of a bomb exploding during the event have not been confirmed.

Galyaviev surrendered to the police and National Guard after the 20-minute long massacre. He has been charged with multiple counts of murder.

Galyaviev, who comes from a poor family in the city and had previously graduated from the school, was by all indications mentally disturbed. Before going on the rampage, he posted a video on the popular social media platform Telegram, in which he described himself as “God” and announced that he would kill “a huge number” of people. He said, “I didn’t immediately understand that I am God, not until two months ago. And in the summer a monster was awakened in me. I began to hate everyone. I have always hated everyone and began to hate everyone even more.” He reportedly stopped attending his college classes around January and was recently expelled.

The shooting has provoked horror and an outpouring of sympathy across the country and internationally. It is the mass shooting in Russia with the greatest number of fatalities since the Kerch school shooting of 2018 in Crimea, in which two dozen people were killed. In recent years, there have also been several fatal

stabblings in Russian schools.

Russian politicians have responded to the disaster with a combination of platitudes that seek to deflect attention from the social causes of the shooting and exploit the tragedy for state repression. Such is commonplace in the US after events of this character.

Russian President Vladimir Putin blamed overly lax gun laws, and the Russian government is now working on a bill limiting the purchase of firearms. The speaker of the State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, also declared that the parliament would discuss a bill that would make it illegal for internet users to remain anonymous, in order to fight “propaganda of violence” and “extremism” after the Kazan shooting. The Russian government has already heavily censored the internet and banned the use of virtual private networks (VPNs), which hide the IPs of individual users.

Not a single politician has been able to honestly address the social roots of this horrific massacre. The mayor of Kazan, Ilсур Metshin, could do little more than declare it a “terrorist act” of the “most base, most degraded kind that you can imagine.”

However, the fact that a mentally disturbed youth like Galyaviev could conceive of such a horrific act of mass murder cannot be understood outside the profoundly diseased state of Russian society. The crimes of Stalinism, culminating in the destruction of the Soviet Union by the Soviet bureaucracy three decades ago, have left generations without a viable social and political perspective. The vast majority of working class people live in poverty, while a criminal oligarchy has enriched itself to an extraordinary degree by plundering the former property of the Soviet state. Russia is now the most unequal large economy in the world.

The coronavirus pandemic has further deepened and

revealed the brutality underlying social relations. The past year, during which Galyaviev's mental health seems to have deteriorated sharply, was one of social murder—above all of workers and poor people—on an unprecedented scale in both Russia and internationally.

The Russian oligarchy has been as indifferent to the suffering and deaths of the population during the pandemic as its international counterparts. It pushed for a premature reopening of the economy last spring. The COVID-19 death toll in Russia is extremely high. While only 113,647 deaths have been officially acknowledged, Russia lost half a million citizens last year, more than at any time since 2005.

Recent estimates, which have put the global death toll of the pandemic at 6.93 million, assume that as many as 593,000 people have died from the disease in Russia, almost as many as in Brazil. The number of people perishing from the virus is so high that the business daily *Vedomosti* suggested that official statistics now show a lower total number of people living in extreme poverty because so many from this category have died.

Despite an effective Russian-made vaccine, Sputnik-V, daily new cases have plateaued at between 8,500 and 9,500 for the past two months. Epidemiologists fear that a third wave may be coming, with substantial portions of the Russian population still not vaccinated.

While the poor have suffered enormous hardship and mass death, there are more Russian billionaires now than before the pandemic. According to *Forbes*, the number of Russians in this category has grown from 99 to 117 during the pandemic. They are now worth a collective \$584 billion, up from \$385 billion the year prior. The ten richest Russians all became wealthier and are now worth a combined \$223 billion, up from \$152 billion.



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