

Racist riots target Sinti and Roma in Russia amid rise in far-right violence

Andrei Grozov
19 November 2024

On the evening of October 24, mass riots took place in Korkino in the Chelyabinsk Region of Russia against the local diaspora of Sinti and Roma. The riots, which resembled a pogrom, were caused by the murder of a 40-year-old cab driver the previous day.

The day before, on the evening of Wednesday, October 23, the body of 40-year-old cab driver Elena Sarafanova was found murdered on Vatutina Street in Korkino. She had reportedly answered a call by members of the Roma diaspora. The woman had died as a result of stab wounds. At 6:00 p.m. the next day, law enforcement officers reported the arrest of a 17-year-old suspect, a member of the Roma community.

The Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL) condemns the racist riots. The events in Korkino are part of an international trend in which the far right is being built up and encouraged by the ruling class and its state apparatus in order to divide and suppress the working class.

Several media reports indicate that the riots were directly provoked by nationalist forces.

Immediately after the news of the murder, messengers and social networks in various nationalist communities began to disseminate statements about the incident and claimed that local Roma in Korkino had long been committing offenses, with law enforcement agencies refusing to act and then delaying the search for the perpetrators.

The following evening, a crowd of at least 150 mostly young people gathered outside the homes of members of the Roma diaspora and began throwing stones at their windows, overturning cars and setting houses on fire.

Soon after the far-right unrest began, riot police arrived, after which the security forces dispersed the rioters. Three people were reported injured, including one member of the Roma diaspora. It is known that one of the Roma shot back with a firearm and wounded two people; he was later detained. According to law enforcement authorities, a total of 43 rioters were detained that day.

The authorities promised to provide material assistance to the family of the murdered woman and to hold a meeting with local residents. The meeting, which took place on October 26, was attended by the governor of the Chelyabinsk region, Alexei Tekslar, as well as other high-ranking officials. The main topic was the city's Roma diaspora. They were also present at the funeral of the murdered Elena Sarafanova, which took place that day. The day before, police warned residents against following the instructions of provocateurs on the day of the funeral.

The head of the Korkino police department, Vladimir Dyakin, was suspended, and the head of the Korkino district of the Chelyabinsk region, Natalia Loschinina, resigned. According to reports on October 29, 400 police officers were still patrolling Korkino, police also reported 450 offenses uncovered in subsequent inspections, and 70 summonses to the military enlistment office issued to local residents (reportedly Roma diaspora members).

The issue of the Roma diaspora was subsequently raised at two more meetings with local residents. The authorized presidential representative

in the Urals Federal District (which includes the Chelyabinsk Region), Artem Zhoga, instructed the chief federal inspectors to analyze the interethnic situation in all regions of the district against the background of the unrest in Korkino.

There are indications that the far-right forces behind the riots have ties to and received encouragement from the highest levels of the state apparatus. Shortly after the murder of the woman in a provincial town in the Ural region and the shortly before the beginning of the riots, the investigation was taken under the personal control by the head of the Investigative Committee, Alexander Ivanovich Bastrykin.

This means that the case is now being handled by the central law enforcement agencies in Moscow. Bastrykin has held his position since 2011, and his term of office has been extended for the second time by President Vladimir Putin, who studied together with Bastrykin at Leningrad State University.

Putin had also personally intervened to extend the age limit of the head of the Investigative Committee to 70 years, up from 65 years. Bastrykin is now 71. Having long broadcast far-right rhetoric on the issue of migration, since 2023 Bastrykin has become a favorite statesman of the far right, which is now regularly asking him to “clean up” any incident involving their activists (usually from the paramilitary nationalist social movement Russian Community).

Bastrykin is notorious for his ties to the far right. For example, in a case in late April of this year, fascist *obshchinniki* from the “Russian Community” surrounded a school in Bataysk to “deal with a student from the national diaspora” (i.e., an immigrant) who had previously had a conflict with a Russian teacher. The administration was forced to keep students from leaving the building during this virtual siege by the far right to prevent physical altercations and injuries.

After the police arrested three nationalists and initiated administrative proceedings, Alexander Bastrykin personally intervened and instructed an inspection into the initiation of criminal proceedings against “public activists who defended citizens who suffered from illegal actions.”

Similarly, in late August, Bastrykin instructed three times to initiate criminal proceedings against police officers in St. Petersburg who arrested and drew up administrative reports on activists of the “Russian Community” who had come for a “showdown” with non-Russian cab workers from Dagestan over a conflict that had arisen before. As in the case in Bataysk, Bastrykin claimed that the fact that police sought to hold nationalists to account constituted an “abuse of power.”

The October 24 riots in Korkino are the culmination of a notable growth in far-right violence over the past two years. After a period in which they were extremely rare, nationalist attacks on non-Russian nationalities, a ghost of the 2000s and early 2010s, began to return to the streets of cities in recent years. The rise in the number and ferocity of attacks was first recorded in 2023 and continues to this day.

At that time, over a period of four months, independent researchers recorded over 400 unique videos capturing numerous incidents of racially

and nationalist motivated attacks. These videos were filmed and circulated on nationalist social media by the attackers themselves.

Russia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, and its economy relies heavily (up to 10 percent of its labor force) on non-native workers, particularly individuals from Central Asia, who were transformed into “immigrants” in Russia by the break-up of the USSR. Many of them are Muslim, whereas most ethnic Russians, despite not necessarily being themselves religious, have a Christian background. Overall, up to 15 percent of Russia’s population are Muslims of different nationalities.

The country’s different religions and ethnicities are geographically unevenly dispersed. For example, the Caucasus and Tatarstan are areas of compact settlement of the Muslim population historically living there, and Moscow is the area most densely populated by migrant laborers. All this, under conditions of capitalist realities which aggravate national, racial and religious conflicts, creates the ground for separatism in the national republics and autonomies of the Federation, as well as in everyday interactions between the Russian and non-Russian population.

The growth of far-right violence and interethnic tensions is the outcome not only of the Russian chauvinism promoted by the Putin regime. It has also been encouraged by the imperialist powers who see the domestic destabilization of Russia and the fueling of interethnic and religious conflicts as a central component of their war against Russia and attempt to carve-up the entire region. The aim is to bring about the collapse of the Putin regime, which, in their view, would make it easier for them to gain access and control over the rich resources of the country.

It is important to recall in this context, the recent terrorist attacks in Dagestan (Russia’s North Caucasus) on June 23 this year, when two Orthodox churches, a synagogue and a traffic police post were subjected to simultaneous armed attacks by Islamists in the cities of Makhachkala and Derbent. As a result of the terrorist attacks, 22 people were killed.

Earlier in October 2023, anti-Jewish riots took place in Dagestan, when a crowd of people prevented passengers of an airplane arriving from Israel from disembarking at the Makhachkala airport. In both cases, there were indications that nationalist forces involved in these terrorist attacks had been encouraged by the imperialist powers. The largest terrorist attack in Russia since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, which took place in March at Moscow’s Crocus City Hall, clearly bore the imprint of the Ukrainian government and NATO powers, and was designed to fuel interethnic and religious tensions.

In response, the Putin regime launched a full-scale offensive against migrant workers. It began on the very first day after the Crocus City Hall incident, when OMON riot police ostentatiously conducted detention raids on hostels with workers from other countries and continues to this day.

In the wake of the attack, there was a series of almost simultaneous labor bans in a large number of Russian regions. While, officially, these were enacted on the initiative of each individual governor, in reality, they occurred on orders from above. As a result, masses of migrant workers are being driven from the country that, even before these measures were taken, had experienced the most acute shortage of personnel in recent times.

The repeated frenzied shouting from the rostrum of the State Duma at foreign migrants signals a steep turn by the Russian authorities on the issue of interethnic relations in Russia, compared to the time before 2024. The Russian oligarchy, which emerged from the liquidation of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991, has long used chauvinism for its own ends. The tradition of nurturing and maintaining chauvinistic sentiments in society dates back to the time of Tsarism, when the Russian elites and state promoted violent antisemitism and encouraged anti-Jewish pogroms as a means to divide the working class and stifle its revolutionary movement.

These traditions were revived by the Soviet bureaucracy under Stalin which presented the Russian people as the leading ethnic group of the

USSR at the state level and in public rhetoric, as well as in culture. The Russian man became an “elder brother” to the peoples that were part of the Union, and the history of the conquests of the Russian Empire were portrayed not as a history of forced subjugation and subsequent oppression of neighboring peoples but as a voluntary union of the “younger” peoples with their new Moscow protector.

Today’s Russian bourgeoisie bases itself on this reactionary legacy of tsarism and Stalinism: As before, the church, cinema and music, public and state figures diligently maintain the image of the Russian people as, first of all, a people of greatness, that has historically defeated any external enemy and is the main friend of all other peoples living within the borders of the Russian state. The Bolsheviks and, in particular, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in their time made detailed statements about the falsity of these perceptions.

This year, the propaganda by the Russian ruling class in this regard has undergone a notable development. If earlier the friendship of peoples was presented as the only acceptable approach to their coexistence within the framework of a large country, now racial prejudice is being approved and encouraged by the ruling circles. Not only government officials but all state-owned media outlets are painting a picture of the non-Russian as a crime-prone element and as a badly behaved guest in Russian cities.

In real estate, it is common for ads to note that “only people of Slavic appearance/nationality” will be allowed to rent or sell. Along with this, and with the rise of far-right violence that began even before the events of 2024, far-right nationalist media is gaining popularity in Russia. The above-mentioned “Russian Community” has more than half a million subscribers on Telegram, and the DSMRG *Rusich*, a neo-Nazi military formation fighting on the side of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine, has 239,000 subscribers on Telegram. Other fascist media also have tens and hundreds of thousands of readers. Sections of the Putin regime, including figures like Bastrykin, have well-known ties to such forces.

The promotion of racism and Great Russian chauvinism by the Putin regime is part of its efforts to divide the working class throughout the former Soviet Union and divert social anger over immense levels of social inequality into nationalist channels. At the same time, well aware that an excessive growth of chauvinist sentiments is fraught with destabilizing consequences and realizing Western imperialism is seeking to utilize inter-ethnic tensions to destabilize the country, the Putin regime is trying to prevent them from getting out of hand: ultra-right narratives are still “outside the threshold” of the official rhetoric of the state, the media and public institutions and are broadcast only by the nationalists themselves.

The Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists condemns these reactionary maneuvers and policies of the Putin regime on the domestic level, which ultimately help bolster the far right and are part and parcel of its ongoing efforts to find a negotiated settlement with the imperialist powers.

We call on Russian workers of all nationalities, religions and ethnicities to oppose the promotion of nationalism and chauvinism by the ruling oligarchy. The fight against imperialist war and the attacks on the living standards by the ruling class can only be advanced through the political organization of a unified struggle by all workers in the former Soviet Union and internationally.

This requires the building of a truly socialist party of the working class in Russia as part of the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the world. The Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL) declares its commitment to achieving precisely this goal: the struggle against capitalism and fascism and for socialism. We call on everyone who realizes the necessity of this struggle to contact us.



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