

Russian court sentences members of Marxist circle to draconian prison terms

Clara Weiss

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A Russian military district court in Yekaterinburg has convicted five members of a Marxist circle in Ufa to draconian sentences of between 16 to 22 years in prison and high-security penal colonies for allegedly plotting to overthrow the Russian government through terrorist means. The case marks a significant intensification of the crackdown on democratic rights in Russia and attempts to vilify Marxism and any left-wing opposition to the Putin regime.

The defendants were found guilty of having organized or participated in a terrorist association, having planned a violent seizure of power, of having seized weapons and explosives, as well as of having publicly justified or propagandized terrorism.

The five defendants were Dmitry Chuvilin, a former deputy for the Stalinist Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF); Rinat Burkeev, his aide; Yuri Efimov, a pensioner; Alexei Dmitriev, a doctor; and Pavel Marisol, a former member of the state security services. The latter two had previously served as volunteers in the Donbass in East Ukraine, where a civil war between Russian-backed separatists and the NATO-backed Ukrainian army raged after the pro-Western coup of February 2014 in Kiev.

According to the prosecution, in addition to meeting for weekly discussions of Marxist texts at the local Stalin museum, they were conducting shooting drills and had concrete plans for seizing weapons and explosives in an attack on military buildings in Ufa. Their alleged goal was to establish a dictatorship of Soviet power. The prosecution claims that the group was active since 2016. The arrests took place on March 25, 2022, just over a month after the Putin regime initiated the invasion of Ukraine.

All of the defendants denied the charges. The prosecution heavily relied on testimony by a former

member of the group, a native of Ukraine, who was working with the Russian secret service (FSB). The defendants claimed that the case against them was fabricated to “destroy Russian communist ideas,” that they had not engaged in any terrorist organization and that all their talk was “drunken chatter.” After the announcement of the verdict, they shouted “fascists” in the courtroom. All of them claimed to have been subject to torture and other forms of coercion.

The connections of these individuals to the Russian state and military and the KPRF, a right-wing state-embedded party, raise questions about the nature of this group and indicate that conflicts within the state apparatus may have played a role in this case. However, the media coverage and the extreme prison sentences make clear that the Russian state seeks to use this case, above all, to intimidate left-wing opposition to the Putin regime.

In the courtroom and media coverage, a heavy emphasis was placed on the fact that the defendants read classical Marxist texts by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin, the co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution. In the Russian media coverage, the defendants were deliberately described as “Marxists,” creating the false impression, given the indictment, that Marxism is linked to terrorism.

Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable growth of youth groups and other circles that have expressly sought to study classical Marxist texts. While many—apparently such as the one in Ufa—have been under the dominant influence of Stalinism, others have been marked by an interest in the ideas of Leon Trotsky, the principal socialist and internationalist opponent of Stalin. The draconian prison sentences for the members of the group in Ufa were clearly meant to slander, criminalize and intimidate workers and young

people involved in these circles and, more broadly, those interested in classical Marxism and, specifically, Trotskyism.

This included, most notably, the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL), a Trotskyist youth group with members from across the former Soviet Union who have turned to the International Committee of the Fourth International. Its leader, the Ukrainian Trotskyist, Bogdan Syrotiuk, has been imprisoned in Ukraine on trumped-up charges of “state treason” because the YGBL took a principled, Marxist stance in opposition to the war in Ukraine, fighting for the unity of workers in Russia and Ukraine.

The significance of the case of the Ufa group can only be understood in the broader political context of an escalating campaign of censorship and historical falsification. Over the past year, in particular, the Putin regime has systematically intensified media and internet censorship, while continuing to promote Joseph Stalin, the “gravedigger” of the revolution, and undermining historical research into the Stalinist terror, when tens of thousands of revolutionaries were murdered.

Since the spring, there have been rolling internet blackouts in many regions of Russia which have result in people being cut off from the internet sometimes for weeks at a time. Many of the most important social media platforms that people in Russia use to learn about international developments and discussions and communicate with people outside of Russia, such as YouTube and WhatsApp, have been blocked entirely or partially. As a recent article on the WWSWS noted, Russian workers are deprived of almost any information regarding the reactionary policies of the Trump administration, which Vladimir Putin is praising regularly as he seeks to negotiate a deal in the Ukraine war with US imperialism.

While increasingly suppressing any means to access information from the outside world, the Russian oligarchy has also intensified its campaign of historical falsification and efforts to rehabilitate Joseph Stalin. Coinciding with the 108th anniversary of the October Revolution, Russian state TV released a major television series, entitled *Chronicles of the Russian Revolution*, which is filled with the most vile and outrageous historical slander and falsifications. Its principal funder and producer was Alisher Usmanov,

one of Russia’s wealthiest oligarchs with an estimated net worth of \$14.4 billion in 2023.

An overview by Memorial, the organization principally associated with research on the Great Terror which was banned in December 2021, found a noticeable growth in the erection of Stalin monuments in 2025. Thus, between January and November 2025, 17 new monuments and memorial plaques honoring Stalin were established, more than in all of 2024. According to Memorial, the Stalinist KPRF, which defends the Great Terror to this day and functions as a “loyal opposition” to the Putin regime, as well as veterans of the war in Ukraine, has been the driving force behind many of these initiatives.

At the same time, the Kremlin has moved to dramatically limit the ability of researchers, Russian and foreign alike, to access vitally important information about the history of the Communist International and the Great Terror. Thus, most archival holdings on the history of the Communist International, which include vast materials on the history of the workers’ movement in Asia, Europe and Latin America, have been re-classified as “state secrets” and are no longer available to researchers. The Russian state has also re-introduced an older rule, according to which the personal files on victims of the terror can only be accessed if a relative of that victim expressly agrees to it. In cases when there may be no living relatives at all or no known relatives, this rule makes it all but impossible to access archival material.

All of these moves are motivated above all by the fear of the Kremlin that, under conditions of the war in Ukraine and a growing social crisis in Russia and internationally, access to information about the situation facing workers abroad, as well as the historical truth about the crimes of Stalinism against the October Revolution, will provide the basis for the resurgence of the powerful internationalist and Marxist traditions of the Russian working class.



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