

A series of attacks at Russian schools

By Clara Weiss
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Two major attacks on high school students by fellow teenagers occurred in Russia this month. In all, within one week, three schools witnessed attacks, and another school a stabbing. Dozens of children and several teachers were wounded.

The most widely covered attack occurred on January 15, at school No. 127 in Perm, an industrial city in the Urals. Two 16-year-olds, wearing masks, burst into a fourth-grade classroom and attacked the teacher and then the children with knives. Twelve youth, including the assailants, and the teacher were wounded.

The teacher, Natalia Schegulina, who was stabbed 17 times, and two children were listed in critical condition. One of the alleged assailants attended the 11th grade (the last year in Russian high schools) at the same school. He is the son of a relatively successful local designer, and, judging by media reports, had done fairly well in school.

The other alleged attacker had been suspended from school, reportedly at the request of his parents, because of mental health issues. According to *Russia Today*, he is the son of a successful local businessman, who owns numerous companies in the city. A widely discussed YouTube video shows the youth, who was in psychiatric treatment, rambling in an apparently intoxicated state. On social media, he expressed support for the campaign of right-winger Alexei Navalny, arguing that it didn't matter who would "ruin the country," which he described as a "country of slaves." He also participated in a closed group on Vkontakte (VK), the Russian equivalent of Facebook and one of the most popular websites in the world, which glorified the April 1999 massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado.

On January 17, a student at a school near Chelyabinsk stabbed a fellow student during a break.

Two days later, another major assault occurred at school No. 5 in the small military town of Sosnovyi

Bor in Buryatia, located in the Siberian region. A 15-year-old student attacked a seventh-grade class at his school. He threw a Molotov cocktail into the classroom and then began attacking the students with an ax. Five children and the teacher were wounded.

The teacher, Irina Ramenskaya, a Russian language and literature instructor, recounted the horrific scene: "I started to take the kids out. When I came out, I saw that a person was just chopping the kids with an ax. I brought them back in the classroom, where everything was burning. I was bleeding. Before my eyes stood Anton with an ax."

The teenager then reportedly stabbed himself in the chest and jumped out of a window in an apparent attempt to commit suicide, but survived. Earlier reports about two additional assailants have not been confirmed.

According to a report by RBC, which referred to the accounts of fellow students, the teenager had problems with alcohol and drugs and followed skinhead and pro-Nazi websites on Vkontakte. That same day, a student released teargas at his school in Vladivostok, a major city in Russia's Far East, wounding four teenagers.

The limited discussion in the Russian media about the incidents has focused on the lack of security provisions at the schools in question, while politicians and the spokesperson of President Vladimir Putin have evaded making any clear statement on the rampages at all.

As is the case in the US whenever a new mass atrocity occurs, neither the Russian media nor the political establishment dares address the social context in which such disorientation and right-wing conceptions emerge among teenagers and take such violent forms.

Born after the restoration of capitalism in Russia, which has thrown tens of millions of Russian workers and professionals into poverty, these youth grew up in

a climate of extreme social reaction and brutality. Since the destruction of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy, the country has been ruled by a criminal oligarchy that obtains its wealth at the expense of the living standards of the vast majority of the country's population.

Under Putin, there has been a reshuffling of wealth and political control within layers of the ex-bureaucracy, the mafia and the oligarchs who have emerged as the chief beneficiaries of capitalist restoration. While some oligarchs, like Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who advanced positions on foreign policy that went counter to the interests of the Kremlin, were either put in prison or forced into exile, the vast majority of the oligarch-gangsters and criminal bosses of the 1990s have become the "respected businessmen" of the Putin era.

Tellingly, almost 40 percent of Russian GDP originates in the shadow economy that employs about a fifth of Russia's workforce. The shadow economy involves business operations such as illegal financial deals, human and drug trafficking, prostitution, and the widespread practice of hiring workers in construction and other industries without formal contracts.

The working population has also largely borne the cost of the Kremlin's stand-off with US imperialism. The Western economic sanctions and the steep decline in oil prices ushered in a deep economic crisis in 2014. While the oligarchs have feverishly shoveled their money abroad, increasing numbers of Russians suffer from extreme poverty, eking out an existence by growing their own food and renouncing essentials of civilization, including medication, running water and electricity. Wealth inequality in Russia is now the highest among the world's major countries, with the top decile owning a stunning 89 percent of the country's total wealth. (See: "Russia's presidential election campaign unfolds amid rising social discontent")

On television, there is a continuous promotion of nationalism and militarism. After the bloody and criminal Chechen wars of the 1990s, which killed about a tenth of the Chechen population and have led to an ongoing devastation and destabilization of the North Caucasus, Russia has directly intervened in Syria and indirectly in Ukraine in a proxy war with the US-backed Kiev regime.

Under these conditions, the interests of the working class find absolutely no expression in official politics. The current presidential campaign is dominated by the stand-off between Putin, who has been the "godfather" of the Russian oligarchy for almost two decades, and Navalny, a far-right politician who openly supports fascist forces and whose aim is to foster a regime change in Russia in the interests of US imperialism and a section of the Russian oligarchy and upper-middle class.

Politically disarmed by decades of Stalinism, which included the murder of entire generations of revolutionaries and socialist intellectuals, and endless lies about the Russian Revolution, the working class has been unable to fight successfully against this decade-long onslaught of social and political reaction.

It is hardly surprising that such a climate would produce serious disorientation among sections of young people. The reactionary conceptions and utter contempt for the lives of other human beings, including children, expressed by these teenagers are ultimately a reflection of the attitude of the ruling elite toward the general population that these youth have witnessed their entire lives. Their rampages point to the urgent need to provide a progressive, socialist way forward out of the blind alley into which Stalinism and capitalism have led.

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