

Who Ordered Kashin's Beating?

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Perhaps the one positive aspect of the vicious beating of Kommersant journalist Oleg Kashin on Saturday is that the list of suspects is confined to a small number of people — just like an Agatha Christie novel.

The first suspect is Khimki Mayor Vladimir Strelchenko. (He denies any role in the matter.) Sooner or later, Strelchenko's enemies get their heads bashed in. Two years ago, Khimkinskaya Pravda editor Mikhail Beketov's head was beaten so badly that he will probably never recover from the severe brain damage he incurred. On the recent anniversary of that beating, the Khimki leader of the Right Cause party, Konstantin Fetisov, suffered head injuries after he was attacked. Two days later, it was Kashin's turn.

The second suspect is Vasily Yakemenko, head of the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, the spiritual leader of the "Putin-jugend."

In August, Kashin dug out an unflattering story about Yakemenko. Anastasia Korchevskaya, a minor who attended the 2008 Seliger camp held by the pro-Kremlin Nashi youth group,

decided to brag about her personal connections to the organizers by posting a photo of herself with Yakemenko on the Internet. The caption read: “Seliger 2008. Yakemenko still thinks I am madly in love with him.” Yakemenko responded, “Korchevskaya, just because you came over to my tent twice for a couple of nights doesn’t mean that I think you are in love with me.” The blog was deleted shortly thereafter, but before that Kashin had made a screenshot of the interchange and turned the incident into a scandal.

Kashin’s opponents realized that they couldn’t convince Russians that Kashin is an “enemy” based only on his comments about Yakemenko. Something much more incriminating was needed. Then, as luck would have it, Kashin published an interview in Kommersant with an anti-fascist leader who had broken the windows of Khimki City Hall. The interview enraged Young Guard, which responded by posting an article titled “Traitor Journalists Should Be Punished!” on its web site.

There is a third, but less likely, suspect — Pskov Governor Andrei Turchak. Kashin, in one of his blogs, insulted Turchak in an act of carelessness. Turchak, a former head of United Russia’s youth movement, responded by demanding an apology from Kashin — a demand that was worded in such a way that it resembled a threat. Turchak’s office has wished Kashin a speedy recovery and declined to comment on the ongoing criminal inquiry.

There is a list of suspects in the Kashin beating, and there is not the slightest chance that the attack was simply a random act of violence. In a best-case scenario, the beating was the initiative of some fascist organization that was upset with one of Kashin’s Khimki interview. But in all likelihood, a senior official was involved.

President Dmitry Medvedev pledged on Monday to punish those found responsible for the Kashin beating, even if the perpetrators turn out to be senior officials. Since our list of suspects is well-known, asking Medvedev to “take measures” against the attackers without naming a single suspect is cowardly. If we demand nothing more than that the authorities “take measures,” they will respond by saying, “Measures have been taken.”

The real prize for courage should go to Moscow art curator Marat Gelman, who wrote in his blog that he believes Yakemenko ordered the attack. Yakemenko has sued Gelman and is threatening to sue me and opposition leader Boris Nemtsov for linking him to the attack on Kashin.

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