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Goebbels' Guide for Russia

By Victor Davidoff

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After the brutal attack on journalist Oleg Kashin on Nov. 6, the public response included daily one-person pickets in front of the Interior Ministry and a large demonstration in central Moscow. These actions were even larger in scope than protests after Anna Politkovskaya was killed in 2007. Perhaps this is because Kashin worked at Kommersant, one of Russia's most respected newspapers, or perhaps it was because the attack on Kashin was one of several attacks on journalists and activists in just one week.

In the Moscow suburb of Zhukovsky, journalist Anatoly Adamchuk was beaten up in rather mysterious circumstances. In another Moscow suburb, Khimki, unknown assailants attacked journalist and ecologist Konstantin Fetisov with a baseball bat, causing a serious head injury. Khimki is also a factor in the Kashin attack since he wrote on the planned Moscow-St. Petersburg road through the Khimki forest.

But Kashin had other enemies. Blogger Varfolomeev wrote that his publications angered Young Guard, a pro-Kremlin youth movement. Young Guard posted a text describing Kommersant on its official site: "The newspaper is an underground den for those who hate

Russia &mdash a nest of vipers, centipedes and other disgusting creatures from the world of journalism."

Young Guard's site also published an article with a photograph of Kashin titled, "Traitor Journalists Should Be Punished!" This prompted blogger Jabberwokie to note the similarity between the style of Young Guard's publications and newspaper articles about the show trials of the 1930s: "Just change the names and titles, and they are exactly the same."

Blogger Yarsolidarnosc discovered more unsavory activity by pro-Kremlin movements. In Yaroslavl, Steel, the student branch of the pro-Putin youth movement Nashi, posted on its site a document titled, "The Movement's Commandments of Honor." They simply translated the "Ten Commandments of National Socialism" written by Joseph Goebbels with "Russia" replacing "Germany" and without reference to Jews: "Your Homeland is Russia. Love it above all others and in deed more than word. The enemies of Russia are your enemies. Hate them with all your heart. Be proud of Russia. You have to right the be proud of a homeland for which millions have given their lives."

Steel's claim to fame was when it placed photographs of liberal politicians and human rights activists on stakes during the annual pro-Kremlin summer camp in Seliger. Now we know where they may have looked for inspiration.

It is no secret that the movement that called for Kashin to be punished is financed and directed by the presidential administration. For this reason, the Russian blogosphere is skeptical that the people who ordered and carried out the attack will be found. An informal poll conducted by LiveJournal user Blaginin showed that 54 percent of respondents were certain that no one would be found. Only 1 percent believed that the guilty would be found.

The investigation has already been reassigned three times and is now being conducted by an Investigative Committee department headed by Pavel Barkovsky, who has a well-established track record for investigating attacks on journalists. He conducted the investigation into the murders of Forbes Russia editor Paul Klebnikov and Politkovskaya. In both cases, suspects who played minor roles in the crimes were tried but later acquitted in court for lack of evidence.

There are no suspects in the attack on Kashin yet, but the police and investigators have shown a burst of activity. Pavel Pryanikov &mdash aka Hasid, editor of the online magazine Free Press &mdash wrote that the day after the attack on Kashin, several unidentified policemen came to the magazine's office. They were selling a video of the attack from a police surveillance camera. It came out later that they conducted a kind of auction. The largest bidder seems to have been the online publication Lifenews.ru, which posted the disturbing video of the beating on its site.

Perhaps the criminals who attacked Kashin will be found. But attacks on journalists are unlikely to stop as long as the police hold auctions of crime evidence and pro-governmental organizations are inciting hatred against journalists.

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