

Muscovites Debate Kremlin Shooting; Some Fear Reprisal

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MOSCOW, Jan. 27—As official Soviet sources continue their silence on last Wednesday's shooting incident in the Kremlin, Muscovite rumormongers are having a field day.

At social gatherings and in casual meetings, citizens are debating the few known details and adding their own suppositions about the attack by an unidentified gunman against one of the cars of a motorcade carrying astronauts and members of the Soviet leadership.

Ordinary Russians, especially those of the older generation or those with long memories, fear reprisals if the shooting turns out to have been a premeditated act of terrorism by a political enemy of the regime.

Stalin Terror Recalled

They recall that an attempt against the life of Lenin in August, 1918, the subject of a play now running on the Moscow stage, was used as justification for a campaign of repression known as the Red Terror. They also know that the assassination in December, 1934, of Sergei M. Kirov, one of Stalin's lieutenants, was used as a pretext for the great purges of the late nineteen-thirties in which millions perished.

Almost all Muscovites with whom one talks express the hope that the Kremlin assailant, who is reported to have worn a policeman's uniform, was indeed mentally unbalanced, as was promptly suggested last week by a spokesman of the Foreign Ministry.

Western observers do not take this characterization by a Government spokesman seriously because often there has been a tendency in the past in official circles to describe any dissident automatically as deranged.

Pretext Often Utilized

Commitment of political critics to mental institutions has been a method frequently used by the Government in dealing with such cases.

Although ordinary Soviet citizens are aware of this practice, they nevertheless express the hope that the Kremlin gunman was genuinely unbalanced so that no harsh measures may be expected to follow beyond a general tightening of personal security of the leaders.

Although the shots were fired at a limousine carrying former astronauts, the presumption is that the assailant attacked the closed car in the belief that it contained members of the Soviet leadership.