

A Call to Join in the International Days of Solidarity Against Political Repression in Russia

November 19, 2012

An appeal from the Russian leftists to their comrades in the struggle:

Today we, the representatives of Russian leftist organizations, turn to our comrades all over the world with an appeal for solidarity. This call and your response to it are very important to us. Right now we are facing not just another instance of dubious sentencing by the Russian “justice” system or another case of a human life broken by the encounter with the state’s repressive apparatus. Today the authorities have launched against us a repressive campaign without precedent in the recent history of Russia, a campaign whose goal it is to extinguish the left as an organized political force. The recent arrests, threats, beatings, aggressive media attacks and moves towards declaring leftist groups illegal all point to the new general strategy on the part of the authorities, much more cruel and much less predictable than that of recent years.

The massive protest movement that began in December 2011 radically changed the atmosphere of political and social passivity established during the Putin years. Tens of thousands of young and middle-aged people, office workers and state employees, began to appear on the streets and to demand change. On December 10th and 24th 2011, and then on February 4th 2012, Moscow, Petersburg and other large cities became the sites of massive rallies, demonstrating a new level of politicization of a significant part of society. The “managed democracy” model crafted by the ruling elite over many years went bankrupt in a matter of days. Political manipulations ceased working in the face of real politics, born from below. The movement, whose demands were initially limited to “honest elections,” quickly grew into a protest against the whole political system.

After the elections of March 4th 2012, at which Vladimir Putin, using a combination of massive administrative pressure on voters, massive falsifications and mendacious populist rhetoric, assured himself of another term, many thought that the potential for protest mobilization had been exhausted. The naïve hopes of the thousands of opposition volunteers, taking on the role of election observers in the hope of putting an end to voter fraud, were crushed.

The next demonstration, in the success of which few believed, was scheduled for the center of Moscow on May 6th, the day before Putin’s inauguration. And on this day, despite the skeptical predictions, more than 60,000 people showed up. When the march approached the square where the rally was to take place, the police organized a massive provocation, blocking the marchers’ path to the square. All those who attempted to circumvent the police cordon were subjected to beatings and arrests. The unprecedented police violence produced resistance on the part of some of the protestors who resisted arrests and refused to leave the square until everyone had been freed. The confrontation on May 6th lasted a few hours. In the end, over 650 people were arrested, some of whom spent the night in jail.

The next day, Putin’s motorized procession headed for his inauguration through an empty Moscow. Along with the protesters, the police had cleared the city of all pedestrians. The new protest movement had demonstrated its power and a new degree of radicalization. The events of May 6th gave rise to the Occupy movement, which brought thousands of young people to the center of Moscow and held strong until the end of May. Leftist groups, until then peripheral to the established

liberal spokesman of the protest movement, were progressively playing a larger role.

Those events were a signal to the authorities: the movement had gone beyond what was permitted, elections were over, and it was time to show teeth. Almost immediately, a criminal investigation was launched into the “mass disturbances,” and on May 27th, the first arrest took place. 18-year-old anarchist Alexandra Dukhanina was accused of participating in the disturbances and for the use of violence against the police. The arrests continued over the next few days. The accused were drawn both from the ranks of seasoned political activists (mainly leftists) as well as from ordinary people, for whom the May 6th demonstrations were their first experience of street politics.

So far, nineteen people have been accused of participating in those “disturbances”; twelve of them are in jail in pre-trial confinement. Here are some of their stories:

- Vladimir Akimenkov, 25, communist and activist of the Left Front. Arrested on June 10th, 2012, he will be in detention until March 6th 2013. Vladimir was born with poor eyesight. In jail, it is getting even worse. In the last examination, he had 10% vision in one eye, and 20% in the other. This, however, was not a sufficient cause for the court to replace detention with house arrest. At the last court session of the court, the judge cynically commented that only total blindness would make him reconsider his decision.
- Michael Kosenko, 36, no political affiliation, arrested on June 8th. Kosenko, who suffers from psychological disorders, also asked for his stay in jail be replaced with house arrest. However, the court declared him “dangerous to society” and plans to send him for forced treatment.
- Stepan Zimin, 20, anarchist and antifascist, arrested on June 8th and placed under detention until March 6th 2013, after which date his arrest can be extended. Stepan supports his single mother, yet once again the court did not consider this sufficient cause to set him free under the obligation to remain within city limits.
- Nikolai Kavkazskii, 26, socialist, human rights activist and LGBT-activist. Detained on the 25th of July.

Investigators have no clear evidence proving the guilt of any one of these detainees. Nevertheless, they remain in jail and new suspects steadily join their ranks. Thus the last of the players in the “events of May 6th,” the 51-year-old liberal activist and scholar Sergei Krivov, was arrested quite recently, on October 18th. There is every indication that he will not be the last.

If the arrests of already nearly twenty ordinary demonstration participants were intended to inspire fear in the protest movement, then the hunt for the “organizers of massive disturbances” is meant to strike at its acknowledged leaders. According to the investigation, said “disturbances” were the result of a conspiracy, and all the arrested were receiving special assignments. This shows that we are dealing not only with a series of arrests, but with preparations for a large scale political process against the opposition.

On October 5th, NTV, one of the leading Russian television channels, aired a film in the genre of an “investigative documentary,” which leveled fantastical charges against the opposition and in particular, against the most famous representative of the left, Sergei Udaltsov. This mash-up, made in the tradition of Goebbels’ propaganda, informs of Udaltsov’s ties with foreign intelligence, and the activities of the “Left Front” that he heads are declared plots by foreign enemies of the state. By way of decisive proof, the film includes a recorded meeting between Sergei Udaltsov, Left Front activist Leonid Razvozhayev, Russian Socialist Movement member Konstantin Lebedev, and one of the closer advisors of the president of Georgia, Givi Targamadze. In particular, the conversation includes talk of money delivered by the Georgians for the “destabilization” of Russia.

Despite the fact that the faces on the recording are practically indiscernible and that the sound is

clearly edited and added separately to the video, within just two days the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor General's Office (the agency today playing the leading role in organizing repression) used it to launch a criminal case. On October 17th, Konstantin Lebedev was arrested and Sergei Udaltsov released after interrogation, after having signed an oath to remain within the limits of Moscow. On October 19th, a third participant in the new "affair," Left Front activist Leonid Razvozhayev, tried to petition for refugee status with the Ukrainian delegation of the UN. As soon as he stepped outside of the delegation building, unknown parties violently forced him into a vehicle and illegally transported him across the Ukrainian border onto Russian territory. Once in an undisclosed location in Russia, he was subjected to torture and threats (including regarding the safety of his family) and compelled to sign a "voluntary submission of confession" and "statements of confession." In these "statements," Razvozhayev confessed to ties with foreign intelligence and to preparations for an armed insurgency, in which Konstantin Lebedev and Sergei Udaltsov were also involved. Afterwards, Razvozhayev was delivered to Moscow and placed in jail as a criminal defendant. At present, Razvozhayev has asserted in meetings with human rights activists that he disavows these confessions obtained under duress. However, he could not disavow their consequences. "Razvozhayev's list," beaten out of him by torture, has become notorious: it contains the names of people who will before long also become objects of persecution.

The scope of repression is spreading steadily. Quite recently the Investigative Committee announced the start of an inquiry into Sergei Udaltsov's organization, the Left Front, the result of which may well be its prohibition as "extremist." Pressure against the anti-fascist movement is likewise building. The well-known activists Aleksei Sutug, Aleksei Olesinov, Igor Harchenko, Irina Lipskaya, Alen Volikov have been detained on invented charges and are being held under guard in Moscow. Socialist and anti-fascist Filipp Dolbunov has been forced to undergo interrogation and threats on multiple occasions.

It is hardly accidental that the majority of the victims of this unprecedented wave of repression are involved in the leftist movement. At a threshold moment of preparations for austerity measures in Russia, for curtailment of labor rights and pension reforms, the Putin-Medvedev administration is more afraid than anything of an alliance between the existing general democratic movement and possible social protest. Today's wave of repressions is the most important test for Russia's new protest movement: either we hold strong or a new period of mass apathy and fear awaits us. It is precisely for this reason, in the face of unprecedented political pressure, that solidarity of our comrades in struggle in Europe, and in the entire world, is so crucial.

We turn to you with a plea to organize Days of Solidarity Against Political Repression on the 29 of November - 2 of December in front of the Russian Federation embassy or any other representative of the Russian government in your countries, demanding the immediate release of the illegally arrested and the termination of the shameful criminal actions and preparations for new "Moscow trials" based on torture and forgeries. We also ask that you use the most concrete information in your protests and demands, with the specific names and details that we provide in this appeal. This is crucial for every person behind bars today.

Please, send your reports on solidarity action and any other information or questions on this email: solidarityaction2012@gmail.com

Solidarity is our only weapon!
United, we will never be defeated!

Russian Socialist Movement, Autonomous Action, Left Front