

“Managed Democracy”: arrests in Moscow for protesting electoral fraud

Thursday 22 October 2009, by [TORNAGO Mariella](#) (Date first published: 20 October 2009).

Today, October 16, an action took place next in Moscow next to the monument to the heroes of Plevna. The goal of the action was to protest the falsifications perpetrated by the United Russia party during regional elections that took place across Russia on October 11.

Most of the protesters were members of the Moscow Soviet, who were there to decry the manipulations that took place in Moscow during elections to the Moscow City Duma. Several attendees also protested the gangster-like methods employed by the current mayor of Astrakhan, a United Russia protégé, in his effort to secure victory against the opposition candidate, State Duma deputy Oleg Shein. Despite the peaceful nature of the action, it was broken up after a few minutes by OMON riot police.

Around fifty people assembled opposite the Administration of the Russian Federation President; many of them were social activists who are members of the Moscow Soviet. Vladimir Zhirnov, a housing activist and a Moscow City Duma candidate from the Yuzhnoe Butovo district, recounted the falsifications he had uncovered and incidents of the coercion that city officials applied to deputies. Tatyana Belova, a member of elections commission No. 12 (and thus someone who has “deciding” vote on its decisions) gave examples of forged signatures at her polling station.

Several protesters carried handmade placards meant to draw attention to the elections in Astrakhan and the so-called Astrakhan Maidan, where young supporters of Shein from the organization Countdown have set up a tent camp and are conducting daily mass protest meetings. Two of the placards read “We support the Astrakhan Maidan!” and “Return Astrakhan to the Astrakhanians!”

Deputy Oleg Shein was also present at the action. He told journalists about the “gangster-like elections” in Astrakhan, where the city administration employed thuggish methods and its “administrative resource” to combat popular mobilization for his alternative candidacy. He announced that he was prepared to present journalists with a documentary film about the elections entitled “Gangster Coup in Astrakhan.”

Protesters were peacefully conversing with journalists before delivering to the Presidential Administration a petition demanding that results of the elections be declared null and void and that abuses be investigated and the guilty parties punished. Suddenly, regular police, aided by the OMON, began making arrests. Six people were immediately arrested, including IKD director Carine Clément, who was holding a placard in support of the Astrakhanians. As the detainees reported by telephone, the arrests were carried out in an extremely rough manner. One young woman was dragged along the ground for thirty meters before being tossed into a police bus. Among those arrested were Left Front coordinator Sergei Udaltsov and IKD correspondent Alexander Lekhtman.

The arrested were taken to the Kitai-Gorod police precinct, where they were held in the “monkey cage” until 4 or 5 p.m. The remaining participants in the picket followed them there. They gathered next to the entrance of the police station and began chanting, “Freedom, freedom!” This led to their being arrested as well. Eighteen people in all were detained.

"I have just come back from Astrakhan, where I saw with my own eyes how the authorities made a mockery of people's right to vote," said Carine Clément. "They are killing people's faith in law and justice, and we demand an impartial investigation of this thuggish abuse of power and punishment of the guilty parties."

According to the latest information, the detainees are being released one by one after being given a summons to appear in court next week. All of them are charged with conducting an unsanctioned action.

Message to send to Dmitry Medvedev, President of Russian Federation

Object: To put an end to the arbitrary reign in Astrakhan, support citizen structures, organize new, free and democratic elections

Dear Mr. President :

We indignantly heard about the mass frauds which marked the local elections in Russia on October 11, 2009. Especially in the city of Astrakhan where a real criminal coup took place, observers and protestors, as well as journalists were attacked by hoodlums without the police doing anything to enforce the law. Voting supervision became impossible from the intervention of criminal structures, which produced illegitimate results of the elections.

As activists for the cause of housing, policy makers and responsible citizens around the world, we know the struggle that has led social movements for years in Astrakhan. We know that in this city exists a very important Inhabitants Union (Soiuz Zhitelej) that brings together property and district committees in the name of self-management and advocacy of the housing cause. As these inhabitants participated in the electoral campaign on the side of the so-called defeated candidate Oleg Shein, we fear for their safety, for the future of these inhabitants committees that the outgoing mayor, Sergey Bozhenov, could attempt to close.

Mr. President, we ask you to assure their safety and to put an end to the arbitrary reign in Astrakhan. If you try to develop democracy in Russia, you must support citizen structures, associations and inhabitant movements which in Astrakhan demonstrated their capacity of mobilization and will to take charge of their destiny. We ask you, Mr. President, to organize new, free and democratic elections.

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