# Russian nationalists march in Moscow

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On November 4, Russian ultra-nationalist tendencies held a so-called Russian March on the outskirts of Moscow to mark the country's Day of National Unity. The event, organized by several far-right and neo-Nazi groups, attracted several thousand participants according to various estimates. Some coverage reported that the protesters were mainly youth, wearing masks and chanting racist and anti-Semitic slogans such as, "Russia for Russians" and "We will build a white paradise! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!"

The pro-Kremlin youth group *Nashi* (Ours) organized a second "Russian March" on the same day. Around 15,000 people participated, with the crowds singing, "I love Russia" over the course of the event. In an effort to distance itself from the outpouring of far-right sentiment witnessed in the competing event, a *Nashi* spokesman insisted, "this is the only genuine Russian March." The ruling party United Russia organized a separate public event that gathered another 10,000 people, according to police estimates.

Regardless of official claims to the contrary, the Kremlin is a major proponent of ultra-nationalist sentiment in the country. It endlessly promotes illusions in the supposed greatness and superiority of the Russian people in an effort to cover over the real cause of the disastrous decline in living standards experienced by the vast majority of the population over the past two decades—the restoration of capitalism.

The Medvedev-Putin regime regularly caters to and whips up anti-immigrant moods, as part of its strategy for diverting popular anger away from the ruling elite and keeping the working masses divided. There are frequent, violent assaults on immigrants and members of ethnic minorities, mostly coming from Central Asia or the Caucasus, in Russia. The perpetrators often get off scot-free or with very mild sentences, as officials legitimize the racist views that lead to the incidents.

Last December, ethnic violence erupted after Yegor Sviridov, a young soccer player, was killed in a fight by Aslan Cherkesov, a man of Caucasian origin. Dozens of minorities and immigrants were beaten up during riots that followed in Moscow and other cities, while the police did nothing to maintain calm or protect ordinary people. Recently, Cherkesov, who claims to have acted in self-defense, was found guilty of murder by a Russian court and convicted to twenty years in prison.

This latest outpouring of ultra-nationalism comes amid a deepening social and political crisis in Russia. The impact of the world economic downturn on the fragile Russian economy has been particularly severe. The population has been hard hit by sharp increases in the cost of basic foodstuffs, utilities and housing. Since mid-September of this year, the ruble has declined by almost 20 percent, driving up prices on imported goods.

According to the government agency Rosstat, 15 percent of the population now live below the official poverty line of 6506 Rubles ($200) a month. The number has increased by 2 percent since last year. A poll by the Levada Center from September found that 62 percent of respondents named inflation and the impoverishment of the general population as the greatest threat to Russia.

The Kremlin recognizes the political dangers posed by this downward pressure on the living standards of ordinary people. In September, Prime Minister Putin warned about "the dangerous level of social inequality" in Russia at a congress of the ruling United Russia party.

In the current lead up to the December Duma elections, the Kremlin and the various opposition parties have increased the volume of nationalist rhetoric in the country. Layers within the liberal establishment in the country also promote this outlook.

At the Russian March organized by neo-Nazi forces

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on Friday, Alexander Navalny, one of the most famous spokesmen of the liberal opposition in Russia, made his appearance with a speech clearly aimed at channeling frustration over the Kremlin's policies and the growing social inequality in a reactionary direction. He demanded that the government "Stop feeding the Caucasus," a reference to one of the tactics pursued by the Kremlin in this restive region, where brute force has been combined with minimal economic development efforts to quell opposition. Navalny's demand has become a favorite of the far-right in Russia, whose forces displayed it on signs held aloft during the march.

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