

Protests in Russia: Liberals, pseudo-left march alongside far right

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On Tuesday, June 12, tens of thousands of people joined the “March of Millions” in Moscow, which was led by liberal and pseudo-left opposition parties. The protest, with size estimates ranging from 20,000 to 100,000, was the biggest since December last year. It was distinguished by a substantial presence of ultra-nationalists and neo-fascists. Despite heavy police presence, the demonstrations were entirely peaceful and no arrests were made.

Underscoring the right-wing outlook of the event’s leaders, the opposition chose to hold the demonstration on “Russia Day”, a national holiday celebrating Russia’s independence from the Soviet Union in 1990. The restoration of capitalism that accompanied the dissolution of the USSR led to one of the greatest social and economic catastrophes in recent history.

Tuesday’s turnout was large despite repressive measures taken by the Kremlin against protesters and opposition leaders in the lead-up. On June 9, a new anti-demonstration bill that fines people up to 300,000 rubles (around US\$9,000) for participating in unsanctioned protests, “wearing masks” at demonstrations or “disturbing traffic” was signed into law.

Over the weekend, the flats and offices of leading oppositionists Alexei Navalny, Ksenia Sobchak, Ilya Yashin and Sergei Udaltsov were raided. The opposition leaders were summoned for interrogations on Tuesday in order to prevent them from attending the rally. Udaltsov, the leader of the “Left Front”, ignored the summons and came to the demonstration.

Students and pensioners marched next to professionals, famous writers, actresses and entrepreneurs. A commentary on *Gazeta.ru*, a popular online newspaper, noted that the only thing that united the protesters was “the feeling that they are fed up with

the government.” Protesters passed a declaration reiterating the political demands advanced by the liberal opposition from the outset of the anti-Kremlin demonstrations—the resignation of Putin, the holding of new parliamentary elections and the institution of a ban on a possible third term as president for anyone.

Nazi salutes, along with cries of “Russia for Russians” helped shape the tone of the event, with most Russian media reports pointing to a substantial presence of far-right forces. While tsarist flags and fascist slogans were already to be seen at the anti-Kremlin rallies in December 2011, this time their proponents made up an even more notable segment of the marchers.

As one commentator for *Gazeta.ru* observed, the protests “bore more resemblance to the ‘Russian March’ than to previous demonstrations held under the banner ‘For fair elections.’ ” The Russian March is an event organised annually by ultra-nationalists.

Boris Nemtsov, a leading liberal oppositionist and former member of the Yeltsin government, who is of Jewish origin, was booed by nationalists when he addressed the crowd. “Judas”, they cried.

While democratically minded participants were no doubt disturbed by this outpouring of ultra-right sentiment, the liberal and the pseudo-left leadership of the march refrained from making any criticisms of these fascist tendencies. On the contrary, the policy of the liberals and the so-called “left” is to collaborate with these forces, which they justify in the name of preserving “the unity” of the opposition.

One of the leading figures in the liberal opposition, widely praised in the Western media, is Alexei Navalny, who is well known for his chauvinist, anti-immigrant positions. Navalny made a major appearance in the 2011 Russian March.

The well-known nationalist Ivan Mironov, who is suspected of the attempted assassination of Anatoli Chubais, a Russian liberal politician and businessman, was allowed to speak at the rally. He read out loud a letter from an arrested right-wing activist, quoting, “There is no one who doesn’t fear repression...but only in jail do you understand that freedom is worth it.”

The statement by Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov, which emphasised how great it was that so many people had gathered “to protest against repression” by the government, can only be understood as an invitation for further collaboration with the far right.

The Left Front, a political group that was founded in 2005-2006, is a bloc between the Stalinist Communist Party (KPRF), the Pabloite Russian Socialist Movement (RSM), and other “left” forces. It is in alliance with the Other Russia coalition, which includes the right-wing National Bolshevik Party, the Vanguard of Red Youth, and the United Civil Front of liberal Garry Kasparov.

Udaltsov and National Bolshevik leader Eduard Limonov recently engaged in a media clash, in which Udaltsov’s main reproach toward Limonov was the latter’s alleged “determination to split up the opposition.”

The Pabloite RSM, which is aligned with the French New Anti-Capitalist Party at the international level, supports Udaltsov’s line. The RSM approvingly reproduced the “Manifesto of Left Forces” by the Left Front on its website. Arguing that the middle class protests must become a starting point for a broader movement by the working class, the statement advocates the passage of “referendums” on the “main questions regarding the nation’s development”. It puts forward a set of minimal economic demands, such as a moratorium on increases in utility prices, that are of a toothless, populist character.

In a commentary posted after Tuesday’s demonstration, the RSM lamented the political “inarticulateness” of the event, but made no mention, much less warning, of the notable presence of the far right. Their primary complaint was that the liberal opposition worked to exclude the “left” from prominence.

Far from being left, let alone socialist, groups like the Left Front and the RSM are nationalist critics of the Kremlin. Notwithstanding any rhetoric to the contrary,

they are opposed to the principles of socialist internationalism. Their fawning before the liberals and the far right only serves to strengthen these forces and disorient workers, whose desire for a genuine alternative to the right-wing policies of the Kremlin finds no expression in these organisations.

For decades, the Kremlin has deliberately fostered nationalist and right-wing tendencies in order to divide the multi-ethnic working class in Russia, isolate workers from their international class brothers and sisters, and divert social anger into safe and reactionary channels. In embracing and legitimising such views, the opposition works to shore up Russian capitalism.



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