

# Russian government intensifies witch-hunt of migrant workers

**Clara Weiss****18 January 2013**

Against a background of growing social tensions, the Russian government is stepping up its anti-immigrant measures in close collaboration with fascist groups. The opposition parties, whether liberal, nationalist or pseudo-left, have also joined the calls for tightening immigration controls.

On January 9, the Duma (parliament) adopted a law proposed by president Vladimir Putin which strengthens the registration guidelines for migrant workers and Russian citizens. The law will seek to take action against so-called “rubber houses.”

This refers to houses and flats where often up to 2,000 people are registered and pay rent without living in them. Immigrant workers are mainly affected, as they are registered by their employers without their knowledge, and then in reality end up living in cellars or factory buildings. According to official figures, in 2011 there were 6,400 such houses in Russia, where 300,000 people have been falsely registered.

The law includes fines of up to 500,000 roubles (12,500 euros), in addition to prison terms and forced labour of up to 3 years for anyone falsely registering other persons. A person wrongly registered must pay between 2,000 and 5,000 roubles (50 to 100 euros), while the landlord would pay between 2,000 and 3,000 roubles. In Moscow and St. Petersburg, the fines are to be increased by a third.

Russian citizens will also be required to register in the area in which they live as soon as they have resided there for 90 days. This will have an impact above all upon migrant workers from poorer regions of the country such as the economically devastated Caucasus, who have to earn money by moving to other parts of Russia.

The police and other state organisations are working closely with fascist groups in their persecution of

illegal immigrants. In a December report, the Moscow-based magazine *Bolshoi Gorod* described a raid by the fascist militia Svetlaya Rus. The militia undertakes searches for immigrants on behalf of the police and the federal immigration service (FMS). The FMS is an organ of the state, which is responsible for the imposition of the Kremlin’s immigration policy.

According to the fascists’ own account, Svetlaya Rus was contacted by residents asking for “help.” They then organised raids on cellars or flats in which immigrant workers from central Asia were housed, before calling on the police to ensure the workers were deported. The members of Svetlaya Rus were mostly heavily armed and wore black masks when conducting the raids.

On Vkontakte, a Russian version of Facebook, Svetlaya Rus presents itself as a “patriotic youth movement” and “a group to help the FMS.” On his profile page, the leader of the group, Igor Mangushev, published a photo of Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik with the title “Yes we can.” Other photos on his page include Nazi symbols, heavy weapons and a sharp-shooter with the comment, “a sniper has always one aim in life.”

The new registration regulation will give the police and such fascist organisations the perfect opportunity to intensify their pogrom-like activities. Immigrants will be regularly blackmailed or simply deported.

The law is part of a racist campaign against immigrant workers from central Asia and the Caucasus. Since the return of Putin to the presidency last May, the Kremlin has sharply increased its already strong nationalist propaganda and issued one anti-immigrant law after the other. Immigrants have been portrayed as criminals and corrupt and made the target of nationalist attacks in order to divert attention from social problems

and the economic crisis.

In October Putin spoke out in favour of a ban on headscarves in schools, and in November he signed a law which requires immigrants seeking work in retail or with publicly owned organisations to undertake Russian language tests. In the same month, the Duma proposed a law which provides for prison terms of up to six years for workers who had been previously deported.

The right-wing Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) suggested in October that the government should establish camps across the country to keep immigrants from central Asia isolated from the rest of the population. The LDPR parliamentarian Igor Lebedev submitted the proposal to a round table discussion on Russian national politics attended by government head Dmitri Medvedev.

So far, Kremlin representatives have not commented on this proposal. However, on October 25 the newspaper *Neavisimaya Gazeta* reported that such work camps already exist for immigrants. The deputy head of administration in the town of Kranoe Selo described such a camp with the words, “Our population and the residents of the camp do not have even minimal contact with each other—the building is surrounded by a high barrier, and security forces keep watch over the area. The camp is located in an industrial area where there are no residential buildings.”

According to estimates, around 15 million migrant workers live in Russia. The majority of them come from the poverty-stricken former republics of the Soviet Union. They often earn no more than 4,000 to 10,000 roubles per month (between 100 and 250 euros), most of which is sent home to their families.

Immigrant workers have no health insurance or protection at work and are subject to arbitrary deportation at the request of their employers or the police. Most immigrants are housed in cellars, small apartments or factory buildings by the companies they work for. These buildings often have no standards of hygiene or security, and this has regularly produced fatal accidents.

Last April, 17 immigrants from Tajikistan were burnt to death in the factory building where they were housed by their employer. They had been locked in the building. In Yegorevsky, a small town near Moscow, 14 workers, most likely from Vietnam, died in a fire on

September 11, and another four were injured. The door to the factory building where they lived had again been locked from the outside.

The nationalist and racist policies of the Kremlin have been supported by all political tendencies, whether Stalinist, liberal or pseudo-left. The only criticisms have come from the right. The collapse of the Soviet Union has created a reactionary political climate in which all political forces have moved sharply to the right, leaving the interests of the working class without any political expression.

The right-wing, anti-working class character of the pseudo-left is particularly clear on the question of immigration. No group of the so-called “left” in Russia has criticised any of the anti-immigrant laws of the Kremlin. On the contrary, the Russian Socialist Movement (RSM), which is part of the Pabloite United Secretariat, has called for a “regulation of immigration....in the interests of those who are working.” Immigrants, the statement continues, are leading to a “cultural degeneration of the countries which imported them.”



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