

Russian authorities persecute immigrants

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Russian authorities have conducted a wave of raids against immigrants in Moscow since the end of July, arresting somewhere between 1,500 and 3,000 people. Around 600 are now housed in a detention centre in Moscow awaiting deportation.

The raids are being carried out during mayoral elections in Moscow and have the support of all the candidates involved. The brutal crackdown is patently aimed at diverting attention from the economic crisis and preparing the public for the nationwide establishment of detention camps for immigrants.

The immediate pretext for the mass arrests was an incident on July 27 at a market in Moscow. Several men from the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan were involved in a brawl with police, who then reacted by storming the market and arresting hundreds of workers from Central Asia, Syria and Vietnam. Since then, similar raids on markets traditionally run by immigrants from the Caucasus, Central Asia and other Asian countries have taken place across the country.

A worker from Uzbekistan, who was arrested in a raid and detained in Scherbinka near Moscow, told Radio Free Europe on August 7, “We have not eaten in three days. We lie on bare ground. There are people here who really need medical care. They took us to several police districts and forced us to sign all kinds of papers. One of the men was seriously injured. They took him away to sew up his wound. They beat us for no reason.”

Other detained immigrants said they were told to pay horrendous sums to police for bread and water.

On July 31, the police arrested 1,200 workers from Vietnam who had worked in a derelict factory near Moscow. The factory has been closed. In August, 600 mostly Vietnamese workers were interned in the nearby Golyanovo detention camp.

According to media reports, there is no clean drinking water in the camp and only a little warm water. People

are provided with food just twice a day and have only tea to drink. There are only four showers in the entire camp. The captives have to sleep in overcrowded and stuffy tents that are hot during the day and freezing at night. Among the detainees are several pregnant women.

Human rights activists have warned of the danger of an epidemic in the camp, given the lack of hygiene. Last Thursday, 20 inmates had to be hospitalized. According to human rights activists, conditions in other camps under the control of the Interior Ministry are far worse. Russian authorities have announced that all of the currently 3,500 arrested migrants will be deported.

The massive campaign against immigrants, which has dominated the Russian press for days, is aimed at preparing the population for the nationwide establishment of detention camps. The Federal Migration Service (FMS) has drawn up a program to double the current number of such detention centres from 21 to 43 by the end of the year.

The government plans to set up a total of 83 camps for migrant workers in the 81 regions of the country by 2014. Currently immigrants are held in such camps without any legal basis for up to two years and under conditions that are usually applied to criminals.

The Kremlin has stepped up the campaign against immigrants since the beginning of Putin's third term in May 2012. Immigrants who want to work in public services or retail and wholesale trade are now required to complete Russian language tests. The Kremlin has also passed a law permitting the police to take harsh action against so-called “rubber homes”—i.e. houses in which dozens, sometimes hundreds, of immigrant workers are housed illegally.

In the course of conducting raids against immigrants, the police and FMS often rely on assistance from fascist organizations and/or radical nationalist vigilantes. The latter also organize such raids on their

own with the permission of the police. The raids by state authorities and rightwing gangs are reminiscent of the pogroms that took place in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century.

At the same time, elements of the state itself are involved in human trafficking and the criminal exploitation of immigrant workers. On August 7, the Russian Interior Ministry admitted that two senior police officers and an FMS official were implicated in a scandal involving the trafficking of migrant laborers.

The shadow economy in Russia accounts for approximately 50 percent of total gross domestic product. This sphere of the economy includes human and drug trafficking, the illegal employment of workers (whether in Russia or other countries) in construction and many other industries, and criminal financial transactions. The ruthless exploitation of immigrant workers—the most oppressed section of the working class—is the sharpest expression of the

criminal enrichment of the ruling elite at the expense of working people.

The mass arrests are taking place in the midst of the campaign for the early mayoral elections in Moscow in September. The incumbent mayor, Sergei Sobyenin, was appointed to the post by then President Dmitry Medvedev in 2011, after the dismissal of long-time Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. Challenging Sobyenin in the election are Ivan Melnikov of the Stalinist Communist Party (CPRF) and the liberal blogger Alexei Navalny, who is supported by the West.

Agitation against immigrants has characterised the election campaign from the start. Putin's ally Sobyenin has publicly stated that immigrants are undesirable in Moscow and made the labor camp in Golyanovo a centerpiece of his campaign.

Navalny is a Russian chauvinist and maintains relations with the extreme rightwing "Movement against Illegal Immigration." Navalny recently supported the nationalist protests in the southern Russian city of Pugachev and called for the mass deportation of Chechens. At campaign events, he has called for the introduction of a visa requirement for citizens from Central Asian states, i.e. about 50 percent of the 10 to 15 million migrant workers in Russia.

CPRF candidate Melnikov, whose party conducts racist hate campaigns and cooperates with fascist forces, demands immigration quotas and the

deportation of illegal immigrants.

The so-called "Left Front," which is also supported by the Russian Pabloites, has called for a boycott of the elections. The leader of the Left Front, Sergei Udaltsov, however, has stated that if in doubt one should vote for the "socialist" candidate Melnikov.



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