

Ahead of parliamentary elections, Kremlin intensifies crackdown on domestic dissent

Clara Weiss
20 August 2026

With parliamentary elections scheduled for September 18-20, the Kremlin has stepped up a campaign to silence critics. On Monday, August 17, the Russian Supreme Court confirmed the barring of the Yabloko party from participating in the elections. Yabloko was the only party to run in the elections on a platform that openly rejected the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Its main candidate and deputy head, Lev Shlosberg, was arrested and sentenced to 11 years and one month in prison on charges of “discrediting” and spreading “false information” about the Russian army.

The sentencing of Shlosberg and the barring of Yabloko in the elections are a reactionary attempt to prevent even the faintest expression of opposition to the war and the deepening social crisis from finding a reflection in the upcoming elections. Prior to the crackdown on Yabloko, multiple deputies of the Stalinist Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) in the Altai region and in the Leningrad region were charged and jailed for days, with the transparent aim of preventing them from participating in the elections.

But the defense of the democratic rights of Yabloko does not by any means signify endorsement of its program. Contrary to what the pro-NATO media such as the *New York Times* claim, Yabloko is not an anti-war party but rather a party aligned with NATO. The party’s “peace program” amounts to a call for the surrender by Russia before the demands of the imperialist powers, which have provoked the war in Ukraine to use it as a launching pad for the carve-up of the entire region.

Completely ignoring the origins of the conflict in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the ensuing NATO encirclement of Russia, Yabloko’s program calls for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, and EU accession of Ukraine and, on that basis, an agreement between the Kremlin and the US. While appealing to fears of an all-out nuclear war, this is a program not for peace but for an agreement by sections of the Russian oligarchy with the imperialist powers to join the plunder and looting of the former Soviet Union.

As is always the case in Western coverage of Russia and the war, the history of both the war and the political tendencies in question is completely ignored. Yabloko was founded and has been headed for decades by Grigory Yavlinsky, who was

centrally involved in elaborating the economic programs for the restoration of capitalism in the USSR which plunged the working class and large sections of the middle class into social ruin. He is widely loathed to this day by the population.

In the military confrontations between NATO and Russia over the past decades, be it in the Middle East or Ukraine, Yavlinsky has consistently advanced a position that amounted to granting NATO, a military alliance that has invaded country after country, murdering millions, all its demands vis-à-vis Russia. This record makes him not a “pacifist,” much less a “democrat.” Rather, he is an advocate for a faction of the Russian oligarchy that believes that, by removing Putin from power and granting all demands to NATO, and breaking up the Russian Federation, it will be able to more directly participate and financially benefit from the exploitation of the human and raw material resources of the region in the ongoing imperialist carve-up.

This is precisely why Yabloko’s positions are widely promoted as “anti-war” by the Western press. Meanwhile, the sentencing to 15 years in a Ukrainian prison of a genuine socialist opponent of the war, Bogdan Syrotiuk, whose writings have called for the unification of Russian and Ukrainian workers, has been met with a wall of silence. But this does not minimize the political significance and dangerous implications of the campaign against domestic dissent.

The barring of Yabloko and the sentencing of Shlosberg indicate that, behind closed doors, the conflicts within the Russian oligarchy and state apparatus are intensifying. In another indication of these tensions, the website Proekt.media recently found that roughly a third of the officials at the Ministry of Defense have been purged since the removal of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu in the fall of 2024.

Having launched the invasion of Ukraine with the aim of forcing the imperialist powers to the negotiating table, the protracted nature of the war and its immense social and human toll mean that Putin finds himself in an increasingly embattled position. As the WSWP and the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists have explained, Putin fulfills the function of a Bonapartist figure, maneuvering between different sections of the oligarchy, between imperialism and the oligarchy and between the oligarchy and the working class. To the extent that

the imperialist powers continue to escalate the war and class tensions grow within Russia itself, this balancing becomes increasingly untenable.

Well aware that military catastrophes and open conflicts within the ruling class in Russia have, historically, served as catalysts for revolution—in 1905 and then in 1917—the Kremlin is deeply concerned that the conflicts within the ruling class are fought out too openly. Above all, however, it fears the development of a movement within the working class.

Vicious as the conflicts within the ruling class are, the primary aim of the anti-democratic crackdown is to intimidate and stifle growing opposition to the war within the working class. In December last year, a Russian court handed out far more severe sentences of between 16 and 22 years to members of a Marxist circle in high-security penal colonies. They were accused of having plotted to “overthrow the Russian government.” Among the key evidence cited were the volumes of Marx and Lenin that they read and debated.

More than half a year later, the political and social situation has become far more tense. Hundreds of Ukrainian drones hit Russian cities on a daily basis, with several hundred civilians killed in the past couple of months. The NATO-Ukraine drone campaign on Russian territory has targeted energy and economic infrastructure, leading to a severe fuel crisis in a country that belongs to the largest oil and gas exporters in the world. The fuel crisis, in turn, has necessitated imports and driven up prices not only for gasoline but also daily necessities and food. There is also immense discontent with the rolling internet shutdowns and growing internet censorship, which have cut off millions from family and friends outside of Russia and significantly impacted daily life.

Both the socio-economic and the human costs of the war are overwhelmingly borne by the working class. While it is impossible to obtain reliable figures, the DC-based think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) estimated that 1.4 million Russian soldiers were killed or maimed in the conflict so far.

Even if this is an overestimate, it is clear that the toll is enormous and growing by the day. The pro-Kremlin website Vzglyad.ru launched a feature site on “Life after the Battle,” featuring interviews with veterans. In a manner typical for the outlet, which aggressively promotes Russian militarism and chauvinism, all the interviewed amputees declared that they did not regret anything and that they did not encounter serious obstacles in daily life. One of the interviews was published under the headline, “Disability is no reason to leave the army.”

In a more honest account of the state of the war, a recruiter for the military spoke to Gazeta.Ru in April about his work of trying to convince people to join the army. Speaking on conditions of anonymity, the recruiter described how state-run companies have been obliged since the beginning to fulfill monthly quotas to contract soldiers. He explained, “Branch directors receive an overall target and issue orders to their

teams: ‘Everyone up and get searching—look from morning till night, do whatever it takes, but we need people. Bring in your own workers; hound HR departments, use SuperJob, tap into your personal networks.’ It goes so far that if you’re from another region, you might even be sent on a week-long business trip to fly home and recruit guys there.”

The regions of Bashkiria and Tatarstan, two of the country’s most populous regions and both heavily working class, account for the highest number of recruits. While the recruiter indicated that some still sign up “for ideological reasons,” he acknowledged that it had become more difficult to recruit. “All those who wanted to join the SVO [Special Military Operation] have already done so.” When asked about the motivations for joining the army, the first ones he mentioned were outstanding mortgages and debt.

Depending on the region, men and women who sign a contract with the army can get what are very large sums of money as bonuses. In St. Petersburg, the regional authorities pay the highest bonus of 4.5 million rubles (around \$52,924.90) upon signing. In other regions, this bonus can be significantly lower. However, in a country where the average gross monthly salary is 100,000 rubles, with many earning significantly less, these sums still make a huge difference for working class families. Although the recruiter did not spell it out, for many, the choice to join the army is a sign, above all, of social despair.

This makes the growing difficulties in the recruitment to the Russian army all the more significant. The recruiter recounted that about half of those who wanted to contract through him have serious illnesses, such as HIV—which has spread in epidemic proportions in Russia—or hepatitis. In one region, according to the recruiter, the military medical commission in Voronezh even accepted someone who was HIV positive.



To contact the WWSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wwsws.org/contact