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Russia

Anti-war activism after Repression Sunday (6 March)

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After the brutal repression of the Russian government against the nationwide anti-war demonstrations on Sunday, 6 March 2022, the question arises what conclusions activists on the ground draw from the situation. The recent arrest of activist Aleksey Dmitriev shows that state repression has not abated in the days after 6 March. Vladislav Siutkin, activist of the [Russian Socialist Movement](#), gives his assessment of the current situation in an interview with the Swiss Movement for Socialism (BfS/MPS) conducted by João Woyzeck (BfS Zurich)

Vladimir Putin's regime intensifies repression

On 4 March, Vladimir Putin's regime reacted to the growing discontent of the Russian civilian population against the invasion of Ukraine by intensifying and legalising repression against opponents of the war. In a rush, [both chambers of the Duma](#) waved through a law that punishes critical reporting on the war against Ukraine, which the government classifies as false news, with up to 3 years in prison and the equivalent of up to 2,500 francs. If critical reporting causes serious consequences, even a maximum sentence of up to 15 years can be imposed.

The legal extension of the repressive scope of action for Putin's regime, this massive incursion into the freedom of assembly, fits seamlessly into the restriction of the freedom of the press. Already in the first week after the start of the war on 24 February, the federal service for media supervision Roskomandsor had the internet pages of the radio station [Ekho Moskvyy](#) and the television station [Doshd](#) closed down at the behest of the Prosecutor General's Office, because the stations had refused to carry the state propaganda about the war. Such acts of sabotage and intimidation eventually forced both stations to close. Important international [social networks](#) have been blocked and are now only accessible via VPN, effectively making them inaccessible to all citizens.

The intensification of state repression led to [nationwide demonstrations](#) on Sunday, 6 March 2022. Russian citizens took to the streets against the war in 69 Russian cities. The government's response was unrelenting. According to OVD-Info, 5,045 demonstrators were arrested on that Sunday alone! According to OVD-Info, an organization dedicated to monitoring political arrests and prosecutions, that Sunday's repression brought to 13,502 the number of anti-war demonstrators detained since the beginning of the war.

Meanwhile, state repression continues unabated. On 9 March, police searched the home of Aleksey Dmitriev, an activist with the Russian group Marxist Union, and subsequently arrested him. No reasons were given by the official side. Possibly because of his anti-war texts. During the search, Aleksey was severely beaten by the police before they charged him with disorderly conduct and kept him overnight at the police station in Khimki (suburb of Moscow). Fast forward to 10 March and a trial was called. The trial had to be postponed when Alexey's health deteriorated. This was because at the time of the arrest Alexey suffered several bouts of post-traumatic encephalopathy and eventually lost consciousness. Paramedics were let through to him, but they left without helping him. The fact that Alexey later had to be resuscitated shows how serious the situation was. When the trial resumed on 10 March and Alexey was sentenced to 15 days in prison for so-called foul play, he was in a semi-conscious state. However, there is concern in circles close to him that Alexey could be detained again after his release under Article 19(3) of the Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Violations, i.e. for alleged disobedience of a lawful order of a police officer.

According to communications on the networks of the [Russian section of Socialist Alternative](#), on 12 March police

officers went through the dormitories of Moscow State Technical University and asked students to sign a resolution on refraining from unauthorized actions for each room. The resolution included a ban on public statements and protests against the war on Ukraine (280.3 of the Russian Criminal Code). In fact, such documents would have no legal validity. It is a method of violent intimidation hidden behind pseudo-legality.

The courage that Russian civilians have mustered and continue to muster is impressive. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the legalized repression by the state and the low-threshold non-transparent procedures of the local police and authorities are aimed at effectively intimidating and silencing.

Among the opponents of the war is the Russian Socialist Movement (RSD). It stands for [revolution - socialism - democracy](#) and supports workers' struggles in all forms and attaches particular importance to self-organization among the population.

he question now arises as to how to proceed after 6 March. Although it is still too early, it is interesting to get to know the activists on the ground who are close to the movement. The interview with RSD activist Valdislav Siutkin gives us an insight into the fresh impressions and thoughts of progressive left forces in Russia.

Interview with Valdislav Siutkin (RSD)

Various anti-war movements are currently expressing themselves in Russia. What does this movement look like and what groups does it consist of?

There are countless ways to protest against what the government calls the "special military operation". The most popular are petitions, meetings and personal statements. In recent weeks, petitions have been signed by hundreds and thousands of teachers, academics, producers, musicians and even priests from the official Orthodox Church. The former team of the now imprisoned Nawalny, as well as he himself, but also our comrades from Socialist Alternative have called for meetings. As can be seen from the reports of OVD-Info - an organization that helps political prisoners [\[1\]](#) - it is mainly young adults who take part in such meetings. They are arrested and could be expelled from universities, as is happening in St Petersburg. Indeed, the government seems to be particularly concerned about resistant students at the moment - I myself was summoned to the head of the youth department of my university because I published a survey on the attitude of students in the Siberian city of Tyumen to the "military operation". And finally, there are personal statements from almost everyone who has access to social media: We know that even Oleg Deripaska [\[2\]](#), Putin's friend and oligarch, has called to stop the war. We also see the same calls from famous artists and athletes, as well as from ordinary citizens of all ages. In summary, I would say that the movement is broad-based, but the most active participants are young adults.

What strategic conclusions can be drawn from 6 March?

Even before the protests, it was generally expected that there would be severe repression. That is why some opposition organizations also called for people to gather in groups far away from the city centre, at least to avoid immediate arrest on the spot. I think this tendency towards decentralization will increase, and it should.

The Russian socialist movement is currently working to rethink its strategy and move from public gatherings to self-organization in the workplace and the workplace, which could eventually lead to strikes and the redistribution of power. As the economic crisis will lead to unemployment due to the war and the policy of repression puts students in danger of being drafted into the army, we will work more intensively than ever with workers and students.

What perspective do you see in the current resentment against the government's war plans? What else could this lead to?

Some think that Russia could become a fascist state, while others expect the end of the regime soon and a subsequent democratization. Personally, I am more inclined to the second option. Of course, there will be a serious confrontation, a bloody reaction by the regime, which will realize its end - it already exists. But it will end soon, because the regime will lose the last vestige of its legitimacy by imprisoning the activists, especially the anti-war activists. I see what is happening to my parents' generation, who were extremely loyal to the regime, and indeed provided its economic and political base. But the social contract they entered into with the state in 2000, pledging their loyalty in return for economic growth, ended in 2014 after the Russian invasion of Crimea. Now they see their children being arrested and conscripted into the army for protesting against the war. I no longer see any reason why people should remain loyal, and I see no power in the regime to buy loyalty for itself or to force it.

Solidarity with Russian civilians and Aleksey Dimitriev!

The Movement for Socialism (BfS/MPS) and all those who follow the news closely in this country are deeply impressed by the civil disobedience of the Russian civilian population, which is not deterred by the fact that harsher repression against views critical of the government has been legalized, nor by the fact that the regime has been able to bring the media into line to some extent. On the contrary, parts of the Russian civilian population do not want to surrender the few democratic freedoms without a fight.

In deepest solidarity, the Movement for Socialism expresses its solidarity with the civil resistance against the hostage-taking of the population by Putin's government, and wishes the Russian population, in ideal communion with the RSD, early democratic self-determination!

At this moment, our solidarity goes especially to the activist Alexey Dmitriev. His case illustrates the precarious situation in which Russian activists find themselves against the war of aggression against Ukraine. But it also illustrates the passion of the Russian civilian population for democratic self-determination! Switzerland and Western Europe must not look away and remain silent when people fight for rights that seem self-evident here: freedom of assembly - freedom of the press - legal security!

11 March 2022

Translated from sozialismus.ch.

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[1] OVD-Info was set up by volunteers in 2011 to quickly monitor arrests during mass protests. However, it has since evolved into a comprehensive analytical organization dealing with law enforcement issues in Russia.

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[2] Founder and owner of the Basic Element conglomerate and founder and owner of the Russian aluminium manufacturing group RUSAL.