

“Putin is a thief”, “Putin is a thief”

100,000 protest in Moscow and 100 cities over rigged elections

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If, even a month ago, someone had suggested that nearly 100,000 people would flood a Moscow square chanting “Putin is a thief! Putin is a thief!”, there would have been, to say the least, certain scepticism among most people. And yet the anger of an increasingly large part of the population at the fact that the ruling regime had to falsify recent parliamentary elections is now starting to threaten the very existence of the Putin regime itself.

The regime did everything it could to prevent people turning out for last Saturday’s (10 December) demonstration. Earlier last week, protests in Moscow and St Petersburg against the rigged elections were brutally broken up. Over 1,000 people were arrested and sentenced to up to 15 days in prison.

The state-controlled media completely ignored the protests. As the demonstrations grew nearer, the regime started to use threats and scare tactics against protesters.

But none of this worked. What started just a month ago as heckles from spectators directed against prime minister Putin in a sports stadium has now snowballed into a mass opposition movement.

Bolotnaya Square, which is within the site of the Kremlin, was filled to overflowing with protesters. It was announced from the platform that even the police estimated, at one stage, there were more than 100,000 protesters there.

Throughout Russia, there were similar protests. Up to 10,000 protested in St Petersburg and significant demonstrations of hundreds and often thousands took place in up to 100 other cities.

Platform

Overwhelmingly, they protested at the blatant rigging of the parliamentary elections. Supporters of all the minor parties, who were blocked from participating in the election, held party flags at the front of the crowd, but none of the banners presented any demands. The demands were generated from below.

When the first platform speaker called for a recount of the votes, the crowd started chanting “new elections!” Significantly, there was not a



“No vote” decries a protester on the massive anti-Putin regime demo in Moscow

sizable turnout at the protests from the three official ‘opposition’ parties, who all had expressed their satisfaction with the votes they received.

A few members of the Communist Party attended with a banner. “Committee of branch secretaries of the Communist Party” was the riveting slogan! In contrast, protesters chanted “Putin should go!”, “Medvedev should go!”, “Churov should go!” (Churov is head of the electoral commission).

The Communist Party is not a left party which seriously challenges the rule of the oligarchs. Increasingly, it is a right-wing nationalist party which uses a few populist demands to build its support.

Participants came along to Saturday’s demonstration with their home-made placards, which were often biting and humorous. Perhaps the most popular slogan was, “Down with crooks and thieves!” – which is the popular nickname for Putin’s party, United Russia.

The platform speakers were supposed to be representative of all of the political opposition. However, most represented parties of the neoliberal opposition, who, even if the elections had been fair, would probably not have gained more than 10% of the vote between them.

The two representatives of the ‘Left’ that did speak (one of whom is a deputy for the pro-Kremlin Just Russia party) just repeated general abstractions. When any of the neoliberal Duma representatives

spoke, including a representative of the Communist Party, the crowds chanted, “Give up your mandate!” (referring to their Duma seats won in the rigged elections) and often drowned out the speaker.

This indicates mistrust and cynicism towards all the parties, summed up by a placard that read: “I didn’t vote for these bastards – I voted for the other bastards!”

The platform, disgracefully, not only justified working with the far right but even invited one of the leaders of the extreme right ‘Russian March’ to speak.

Repeatedly during the demo, far-right thugs kept attacking the LGBT contingent, trying to tear away their placards and to take their flag. CWI members and LGBT activists had to form an informal cordon around the activists to prevent the attacks.

Unfortunately the protesters taking part in last Saturday’s tremendous show of anger against the regime were sent home at the end of the day with no proposals on how to develop the protests.

CWI supporters held banners with slogans calling for new free elections, the sacking of the electoral commission and for the elections to take place under the control of elected commissions of workers and residents from each area.

Our slogans also included the call for the establishment of a workers’ party to represent the interests of the vast majority in society, offering a socialist alternative.

The CWI distributed thousands

of leaflets and sold all its newspapers. During the protests we also updated our website with reports of the protests from all over Russia. These reports were read by tens of thousands.

Ruling elite

After these mass protests, the ruling elite in Russia are licking their wounds. It seems now they have decided to rely on the neoliberal opposition leaders to deflate and mislead the mass movement.

In an attempt to try to defuse growing popular anger over the parliamentary elections, president Medvedev announced on 11 December an ‘investigation’ of allegations of election rigging. Only the events of the next few days and weeks will show whether the regime can succeed or not.

Workers, disgusted with the blatant election rigging, also face rising costs of living and falling living standards. The organised working class is essential to bringing about real political and social transformation. It is the most powerful potential force for change, using its methods of mass struggle, such as industrial action and the general strike.

The CWI stands for the creation of a mass workers’ party to fight for the overthrow of the oligarchs and capitalism and for the democratic, socialist re-organisation of society to end the current crisis and to transform the living conditions of the overwhelming majority.

The Committee for a Workers’ International

The Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated.

The CWI is organised in 45 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world.

For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk

www.socialistworld.net

The CWI website contains news, reports and analysis from around the world. Recent articles include:



A system in crisis

Capitalist chaos worldwide - class struggle sharpens.

CWI document - a socialist analysis



USA: Occupy protests shut down Washington state capitol

Police violence follows.

Ted Virdone, Socialist Alternative, (CWI supporters USA)



Belgium: Tens of thousands rally for steel plant nationalisation

“Without our work, your capital isn’t worth a penny”.

CWI reporters

Kazakhstan – 20 years of authoritarianism!

International day of solidarity action with workers’ organisations

On 16 December 2011, the Republic of Kazakhstan celebrates 20 years as an independent state, a status it achieved as the Soviet Union collapsed.

While a clique around president Nazarbayev’s family have become extremely rich and the big banks, oil companies and other multinationals have gained almost unrestricted access to the country’s wealth and natural resources, the mass of the population lives in dire conditions.

If they dare to speak out, they face repression and violence. Lawyers, human rights activists, journalists and trade unionists are regularly beaten, jailed and some have been murdered.

All the main opposition parties are banned from participating in parliamentary elections next January. The independent trade union,

Zhanartu, and the opposition Socialist Movement Kazakhstan, were refused legal registration. Their leaders, Esenbek Ukteshbayev and Ainur Kurmanov, are subject to ludicrous criminal investigations that could lead to prison sentences of up to six years.

Despite all this, EU leaders rush to congratulate President Nazarbayev on Kazakhstan’s 20th anniversary. EuroNews carries paid advertisements which portray Kazakhstan as a haven for business. Former British prime minister, Tony Blair, is an adviser to Nazarbayev.

Paul McCartney is due to perform at the regime’s official ‘jubilee concert’ to mark independence. We appeal to Paul McCartney to follow the lead of the musician Sting, who cancelled his concert in Kazakhstan, last July, in protest at the violation of

the rights of striking oil workers.

The striking oil workers in West Kazakhstan are calling a mass protest on 16 December. They explained this during an hour long skype conference with Irish Socialist Party MEP, Paul Murphy. They explained that they were under huge pressure from the state and employers and that their bank account had been frozen to prevent solidarity support arriving.

Despite this they are not cowed. They are planning their action on the 16th in the hope that it helps to spread information about their situation. Paul in reply explained that the CWI was calling for a day of solidarity on 16 or 17 December precisely to help mobilise support for the strikers.

They have issued a statement rejecting the current political parties

in Kazakhstan and calling for a boycott of the coming parliamentary election (in January). They say that because there is no party representing their interests, “the time has come to establish a mass workers’ party, which, differing from other political parties, will in deeds rather than words stand up in defence of the interests of the working class, their families and children”.

This resolution, passed by a mass meeting, has now been circulating in Kazakhstan as a petition and has already collected over 16,000 signatures.

The Campaign Kazakhstan is organising international protests around Kazakhstan’s ‘independence’ celebrations to highlight the real situation facing opposition activists, oil workers and the majority of people in the country.