

Russia: Motorway construction through Khimkinsky forest halted

Struggle to save environment and for democratic rights continues

ON 7 August, Russian CWI activist, Igor Yasin, and two other CWI members, were brutally attacked by thugs following a peaceful protest in Moscow over the proposed construction of a major new road through Khimkinsky forest, part of Moscow's green belt. French based multinational, Vinci, was awarded the one billion euro contract for the new road project.

On 26 August, Russian president Dmitry Medvedev announced the suspension of the road building. This decision was made for a variety of reasons. However, the protests organised by CWI members and supporters internationally – including pickets of Russian embassies and protests at Vinci offices around the world – undoubtedly had an effect on the Russian authorities and shows the importance of such solidarity actions.

MEDVEDEV'S DECISION undoubtedly marks a retreat forced on him by those who have actively campaigned against the destruction of this part of Moscow's now critical green belt. The government's retreat is our success; it is a clear success for the local residents and activists.

Igor Yasin,
Moscow

At the same time as the suspension of construction work was announced, it became clear that pressure on anti-fascists and opponents of the regime was being stepped up. Dozens of anti-fascists were rounded up for questioning. Around 260 youth were detained by police in the city of Zhukov, not far from Moscow, for trying to attend an anti-fascist concert.

In Moscow, Lev Ponomorev, one of Russia's best known human rights activists, was arrested at the Moscow concert and sentenced to three days in prison. His crime was to carry a Russian flag down one of Russia's main streets on the day the government had allocated as Flag Day!

Two young anti-fascists, Alexei Gaskarov and Maxim Solovov, are still being held and face charges that could see them imprisoned for several years.

This is in contrast to the lack of police action either against the hired thugs who attacked the forest camp or following the vicious attack against three CWI members in Moscow a few days later. This is despite the fact that the director of the sub-contracting company involved in the road building appeared to admit to the Russian press that he hired the thugs.

Moscow's Mayor, Yury Luzhkov, is now trying to claim he has always been opposed to building the road through the forest, even though he ordered police action against the protesters.

An alternative route went through the Molzhaninov region of the city. But that proposal was rejected because, according to the press, the project harmed the interests of the 'Inteko' company owned by Luzhkov's wife, Elena Baturina. (Reputedly, the third richest woman in the world, having used her position to win huge building contracts from Moscow city.)

Risky project

IN THE current climate of economic instability and with growing protests, international finance institutions, including the European Bank, have not been keen to invest in what is seen as a risky project.



Environmental protesters view the destruction of Khimkinsky forest.

The international campaign of protest which took place over the last couple of weeks has also undermined support for continuing with the road building. In this situation, the authorities had no alternative but to ask for 'time-out', so that passions can calm down, until the financial position improves.

But the fact that the decision to suspend the construction was taken without fully agreeing it with all the leading political figures, indicates that the authorities are no longer able to keep what normally takes place behind closed doors from becoming public.

Those who defended the forest won a victory on 26 August, but we should not give up the struggle. There have already been decisions to suspend this construction before

but as things changed, construction has begun anew.

In the past six weeks, activists have been treated to such degrees of repression, pressure and corruption by the bureaucrats and big building sharks that it is difficult to believe that the decision to suspend building will make any difference.

The forest fires in Russia over the summer have demonstrated how the forestry system is in ruins and even the much-praised Ministry of Emergency Situations was unable to stop the fires, secure people and minimise the losses.

Therefore the gesture from above concerning Khimkinsky will not save the health of the environment nor will it assure democratic rights and freedoms. To win those objectives, we need to continue the struggle.

Global food crisis reveals failure of capitalism

RESIDENTS OF Maputo, Mozambique's capital, took to the streets last week protesting at a 30% hike in the price of bread. The price rise is on top of a recent hefty increase in water and energy prices.

Simon Carter

Most households in Mozambique have to spend three-quarters of their budgets on food. The sharp rise in the price of bread was 'the straw that broke the camel's back' and pushed the impoverished people of Mozambique to protest.

As police fired on demonstrators the government announced that the price increase for bread was "irreversible". Ten people have been killed and 443 injured since the protests began.

The outpouring of anger over food prices in Mozambique could presage worldwide protests similar to what happened in 2008. Then, rice prices rose by 277% within six months. Corn became so expensive that millions of Mexicans were unable to afford tortillas. There were hunger riots in Egypt, Haiti, Bangladesh and over 30 other countries.

These protests followed three years of escalating prices pushing millions into food poverty - which has remained at a record high of 1.02 billion people (2009), up from 854 million in 2006. The subsequent global recession has trapped this sixth of humanity in an undernourished plight.

This year, prices of agricultural products have rocketed upwards with wheat prices surging almost 70% since January.

In June, a joint report of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the OECD predicted that food prices will soar by 40% in real terms over the next decade.

The report reckons that rising food prices will promote "a new surge in land grabbing by sovereign wealth funds and other powerful investors which risks marginalising further rural communities."

Although the output of agricultural products is also predicted to rise, the increased demand for crops to meet biofuel targets and to satisfy rising meat consumption in China, India and other 'emerging markets' is pressuring food supplies.

Extreme weather events, possibly linked to human induced cli-

mate change, have affected crop yields. 2010 is already shaping up to be possibly the hottest year on record.

Russia, the world's fourth largest wheat exporter, has experienced record high temperatures, drought and forest fires. The situation has prompted Russia's premier, Vladimir Putin, to impose a ban on grain exports for 12 months.

Unprecedented heavy rainfall, floods and mudslides have destroyed crops in Pakistan and China. The FAO has called an emergency meeting on 24 September to discuss the worldwide wheat shortage.

Speculators

ADDED TO the mix is the harmful role of capitalist speculators, with hedge funds muscling into traditional grain markets over the last decade. Big players such as Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, Morgan Stanley et al, are making billions in profits trading in agricultural commodities' futures markets.

It's estimated that only 2% of commodities futures actually end up with a real exchange of goods. The FAO says: "These deals attract investors who are not interested in

the commodity itself but merely in speculative profit."

The worldwide food crisis shows that capitalism is an inhumane, anarchic system which is incapable of feeding the world's masses because of its insatiable drive for profits.

During the 2008 food crisis The Socialist wrote: "We live on a planet where over a billion people barely exist on \$1 a day and 1.5 billion live on \$1-\$2 a day. Capitalism has nothing to offer them - not even enough food in their bellies. The planet's poor may be starving, but big businesses are raking in super profits. In the developed world also working people are increasingly struggling to feed themselves and their families.

"Ultimately, only a socialist society can eradicate hunger on a global scale. This would entail taking the agribusiness multinationals out of the hands of the profiteers. In their place would be a democratically run and publicly owned food industry; only then can we start planning production for the needs of the world's people."

Two years on, the message remains the same.

More in a future issue

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 40 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:



Towards a 24 hour all-European general strike!

The international day of workers' action, called by the European TUC for 29 September, could be an event of major importance for the working class movement in rolling back the capitalists' austerity plans.

Statement by CWI



Nigeria: Goodluck Jonathan presidency

Can Nigeria experience positive development and improved living conditions?

From Socialist Democracy, paper of the Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI in Nigeria)



Northern Ireland

Dissident Republicanism has nothing to offer but a return to sectarian killings.

Gary Mulcahy, Socialist Party (CWI Ireland)