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Communists, Ex-Soldiers Take to Streets

By Alexandra Taranova

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Soldiers dressed in World War II-era Red Army uniforms participating in a parade across Red Square on Sunday. **Ivan Sekretarev**

About 4,000 Communist supporters commemorated the 1917 Revolution at a gathering tarnished by scuffles Sunday, while 1,300 former paratroopers demanded the ouster of Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov across town.

Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov told Ekho Moskvy radio that 30,000 participants would show up at the downtown Tverskaya Ploshchad, but a city police spokesman said by telephone that only 4,000 attended.

Members of the radical Left Front group tried to force their way into the Communist rally but were beaten back by Communist supporters, with riot police briefly detaining 10 activists, including group coordinator Sergei Udaltsov, the police spokesman said.

Udaltsov said several detainees sustained minor injuries during their detention and were charged with administrative offenses. He called the incident an "outrageous situation."

“We were willing to rally together, but the Communists sicced the riot police on us,” he said by telephone from the Tverskoi police precinct, where he was being held.

“The Communists acted like traitors, not allies,” he said.

The Communists had no immediate comment about the scuffle.

A World War II parade held on Nov. 7, 1941, on Red Square was re-enacted in the same place Sunday. Thousands of army soldiers and history enthusiasts in old military uniforms took part in the event, attended by city officials, The Associated Press reported.

Meanwhile, paratrooper veterans rallied by the war memorial at Poklonnaya Gora in western Moscow to demand the dismissal of Serdyukov.

But the event was only attended by about 1,300 people instead of the 5,000 promised by organizers, the police spokesman said, adding that the rally ended without any disturbances.

Serdyukov's spat with the paratroopers stems from his September visit to a paratrooper academy in the Ryazan region, where he reportedly insulted the school's head and ordered the removal of a church from the premises.

Serdyukov, a civilian minister, is also criticized within the military for reforms that many officers say harm the armed forces.

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