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Police Cut Short PETA Strip Stunt

By Justin Varilek

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Tracy Patton, right, and Meggan Anderson detained by police officers in central Moscow on Wednesday.
Vladimir Filonov

You can strip for the president in Moscow, but not for animal rights.

Two American protesters with PETA learned that much firsthand on Wednesday, when they were detained at the World Trade Center on Krasnopresnenskaya Naberezhnaya before they could even remove their white fuzzy earmuffs.

Tracy Patton and Meggan Anderson intended to strip down to bikinis on a cold October day in central Moscow to drive home PETA's message, "Leave animal skin to animals."

The place was well chosen, given that four out of five Russians wear fur during the winter months, according to RB Media Group figures. But Patton and Anderson failed to take into account that the city is also full of police who do not look kindly upon unauthorized public events of any kind.

Patton and Anderson were nabbed by officers as they were unzipping their jackets and promptly whisked away in a police car in front of a dozen cameras.

"The two women were detained for an unsanctioned demonstration," a district police spokeswoman told The Moscow Times.

PETA sent a fax and e-mail three weeks ago to the City Hall to register the event but never received a reply, said Yelena Nadyozhkina, a member of Safe Animals, the organization assisting on the Russian side.

"I do not know where we are. We did register, but I'm not sure what happened," Patton wrote in a text message to The Moscow Times some 30 minutes after their arrest.

Police did not let the Russian translators for the two women speak with them at the precinct, nor provide any of their own. The activists were then shipped off to a nearby court, where they were unceremoniously released after a judge never appeared, Lindsay Rajt, associate director of campaigns at PETA, said by telephone.

This is not the first event of this kind seen by Moscow this year. In August, a group of young female supporters of President Dmitry Medvedev undressed to their underwear in Pushkin Square in support of his anti-beer legislation, proposing that passers-by pour out their beer into a bucket and stripping off items of clothing for every few liters collected that way. The event was not sanctioned, but police made no attempt to intervene.

The sport is even more popular in neighboring Ukraine, where members of the radical feminist group Femen regularly strip topless in public to protest a variety of issues, from sex tourism to the outcome of elections. The protesters, however, are usually detained by police after a few moments before cameras.

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