The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Wanted: Hand out Leaflets

By Kevin O'Flynn

November 30, 2011

There was a long line on Pushkin Square earlier this month, 50 people standing patiently. On the other side of the square the screechy histrionics of an LDPR meeting could be heard, and it was clear who the people were. Walking past, a young man with a clipboard came up and offered 200 rubles ($6) to be a fake supporter in the fake demo for the fake party. I said no, and he looked me up and down and immediately raised the figure to 250, which felt kind of good at the time.

Now with only a few days to go till Dec. 4, I know he was selling me short. Three hundred to 500 rubles is a more reasonable price, especially with elections season being the true season of giving. All you need is some spare time, a warm coat and a complete lack of political conscience and the money is yours.

This is not the crudity of direct vote-selling but the chance to be a willing participant in the selling of the whole elections process, from the man handing out the leaflet on the street, who you might have foolishly thought was a political activist — paid 500 rubles an hour — to the woman in the stands at a political meeting — paid up to 1,000 rubles — to the elections observers — paid up to 6,000 rubles (United Russia).

Before the big payday on Sunday, a conference Friday needs attendees. “Your aim is to sit in the conference hall and listen to the speakers,” says the advertisement, sounding like a director nurse-feeding an idiot extra his motivation for a scene, which may be the case seeing as the ads are all on the extras web site Massovki.ru.

The site has its own separate section for extras linked to politics where there are dozens of ads.

One such ad is looking to boost numbers for a “super-event” on Dec. 5 and 6 at VDNKh, where although you’re not paid, you’re guaranteed a winter coat from United Russia, dinner and a pajama party if you stay the night. The ad knows its readers well, and emphasis is placed on the fact that the UR speeches only last 30 minutes and that those who want to leave early can go at 3 p.m.

Most of those applying to take part in the wholesale prostitution of the political theater seem to be budding actors and have responded with the kind of casting details they think needed. Artyom notes his height, weight and the fact that he is bald “at this moment.” Another puts his shoe size, 44, and hat size, 59.

If you’re really good at the game of being an elections extra, I’m sure you can make a good business by, say, appearing in a demo for Nashi on Thursday, handing out leaflets for LDPR on Friday and clapping and cheering a speech of United Russia on Saturday. You’re still going to be screwed on Sunday, though.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/11/30/wanted-hand-out-leaflets-a11137