

# Udaltsov Urges Opposition to Stay United

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Opposition leader Sergei Udaltsov leading a group of protesters Monday after serving a 10-day jail sentence. **Sergei Karpukhin**

Leftist opposition leaders drew about 200 activists to a Moscow rally and urged reaching out to blue-collar workers to try to expand the protest movement against Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov on Monday told the crowd on a snowy square outside the Ulitsa 1905 Goda metro station that only by staying united can they hope to pose a serious challenge to Putin, who is aiming to win a third presidential term in March.

In addition to demanding free elections and political reforms, he said the protesters should defend the rights of workers and demand stronger social protection for the poor.

The activists, some of whom waved red Communist flags, dislike some of the liberal and pro-business leaders at the forefront of the opposition.

Other speakers urged the activists to visit factories around the country and persuade workers to join a mass protest on Feb. 4. Most of the tens of thousands of Russians who attended

protests in December after disputed elections were middle-class professionals.

The demonstrations, the biggest Russia has seen in two decades, reflected outrage over Dec. 4 parliamentary elections in which the vote was allegedly manipulated to boost the results for Putin's party.

Putin, who served as president from 2000 to 2008, is expected to win the March vote, due to the absence of a strong challenger and the Kremlin's tight hold over the electoral system. ❌

Udaltsov, a 34-year-old rising star in the protest movement, said a splintered opposition would allow Putin to take revenge against his opponents after the election.

"The month I was in jail may turn out to be a bed of roses for me and many others," he said. "If we are divided it might happen very quickly." ❌

Udaltsov spent most of December in custody on charges related to past street protests. By his own count, he was detained about 30 times last year and jailed for a total of 2 1/2 months. His persistence in the face of broad police pressure has earned him new respect from the broader opposition movement. ❌

He warned the government against using force against the protesters, whose rallies in December were peaceful.

"We who have already declared the peaceful nature of our demands, the peaceful nature of our activities, at the same time should be clear in warning the authorities: If they spill blood, this would be a signal to the whole society for a rebellion, and I don't think they will be able to escape responsibility in this case," Udaltsov said.

At least five people were detained late Tuesday during a series of pickets in support of Taisia Osipova, jailed for 10 years in Smolensk on drug charges, which her supporters call a coverup for political prosecution, Interfax said.

About 100 single-man pickets, which require no sanction from the authorities, took place in Moscow.

It remained unclear why the protesters were arrested. Her husband, radical opposition activist Sergei Fomchenkov and the alleged target of the attack on Osipova, was seen by a Moscow Times reporter picketing unhindered at the Chistiye Prudy metro station.

*(MT)*

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