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Teachers Told to Attend Pro-Putin Rally on Feb. 4

By Ezekiel Pfeifer

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Moscow schoolteachers have been ordered to attend a rally supporting Prime Minister Vladimir Putin that is planned for the same day as an opposition march, Gazeta.ru reported Monday.

The administration of school No. 590 received an order "from on high" to send 15 teachers to a demonstration sponsored by the pro-Putin All-Russia People's Front, a teacher from the school told the news site.

The demonstration is scheduled to be held at Poklonnaya Gora in western Moscow on Feb. 4, the same day as a sanctioned opposition march and rally in the city center.

Plans for teachers to take part in the pro-Putin rally were also announced by blogger taki_net, who wrote Saturday on his LiveJournal page that the head of a teachers' trade union promised to send educators to the event.

"Today, speaking on a conference call of the Moscow Education Department, the chairwoman of a teachers' trade union announced that the union will bring out 30,000 of its members Feb. 4 to Poklonnaya in support of Putin," the blogger wrote.

Open-door events have also been scheduled Feb. 4 at Moscow schools and institutions of higher education for visits by prospective students, according to an order by the Moscow Education Department, a copy of which was posted by the Russian Student Union on its website.

In a post on its website, the student group called the order a "ruse" that would cause more students to take part in opposition rallies.

"The Russian Student Union believes this ruse of city authorities regarding the holding of 'profession-related work' on days of demonstrations by opposition forces is an erroneous and absurd decision. Attempts at pressure by bureaucrats on students will lead to the opposite effect — young people will take an active part in the opposition events," the post said.

The Moscow Education Department scheduled exams for students last month on days of major demonstrations, Dec. 10 and Dec. 24. Earlier this month, a city official said schools would not schedule an exam for students on the same day as the Feb. 4 event.

Vedomosti reported Monday that Moscow officials told school directors to move school holidays from the end of March, when they are usually scheduled, to the beginning of the month, apparently in the hope that students would vacation away from Moscow and therefore not participate in anticipated demonstrations connected with the March 4 presidential election.

But the city denied the report. An unidentified source in the city education department told Interfax that "messages on that topic that have appeared in the press are the result of the unusually high atmospheric pressure present in Moscow in recent days."

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