

Rejected Candidates Go on Hunger Strike

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Five candidates in a small North Caucasus town carried their hunger [strike](#) at the offices of local authorities into its third day Thursday.

They are protesting the refusal to register several dozen candidates in an upcoming local legislative election.

As shown in a video [posted](#) Tuesday on YouTube by a user with the account name vintikfiesta, about 50 residents of the town of Lermontov, in the Stavropol region, stormed the Town Hall office Monday, demanding that the vote be canceled.

The group included 14 people who were rejected as candidates for the Town Council in the March 4 election.

One of the protest leaders, Viktor Zakharchenko, a Communist Party candidate who was

prevented from running, told Pik.tv in a separate [video](#) that protesters demanded the dismissal of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

Another protester in the video said people were eager to "foil" the presidential election.

Demonstrators shouted accusations of corruption against local election officials, judges and prosecutors in the face of acting Mayor Viktor Vasilyev and complained that Chechnya and Dagestan natives received priority in social services.

After more than 45 minutes of talks with the local administration, five candidates who were refused registration were allowed to stay at the Town Hall for a hunger strike and were provided mattresses and drinking water by the administration, the video states.

On Thursday afternoon, the protesters continued their strike at the local prosecutor's office, saying it would last at least until the end of the week, RSN radio [reported](#).

Two organizers of the recent Moscow protests against alleged vote fraud in the Dec. 4 parliamentary elections met with the protesters Thursday.

Ilya Ponomaryov, a Just Russia deputy in the State Duma, and Alyona Popova, an independent civil activist, were in Lermontov to see what was going on.

"The town is really seething. I believe that there will be a mass rally on the 26th [of February]. Police are remaining neutral," Ponomaryov [wrote](#) on his Twitter microblog.

In the video, Zakharchenko said 2,000 people were eager to rally to support the protesters. The town's population is about 24,500 people, its official [website](#) states.

"Everyone sees a way out only through new elections in May," Popova [tweeted](#).

By Wednesday afternoon, several senior local officials had visited the protesters for a talk, Interfax reported.

Meanwhile, in downtown Moscow on Thursday, 20 people staged a flash mob and laid flowers at the monument to Lermontov in support of the protesters, Kavkaz-uzel.ru [reported](#).

The local elections commission denied registration to about 50 candidates, including independents and candidates from United Russia, A Just Russia, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Communist Party, the video said.

But Yevgeny Demyanov, head of the regional elections commission, said 90 of the 120 applicants were registered, the maximum number possible, Interfax reported.

A female protester who wasn't identified in the video said she had an "impression that they refuse all candidates who are not on a certain team," apparently referring to candidates opposed to regional authorities' plans to consolidate with the town of Pyatigorsk.

The conflict between residents and local authorities originated last year, when regional authorities dismissed the town's council and Mayor Alexander Dunayev and set a new election for March 4, Dozhd television [reported](#) Wednesday.

Dunayev won't have the chance to return to his post because the new council will appoint the mayor, Dozhd said.

A LiveJournal blogger writing under the name dan-ivanoff, who claimed to have witnessed the dispute at the Town Hall this week, [said](#) the outcry is not a "revolution" but "infighting of the local elite" over federal budget money.

The blogger accused Dunayev of using residents to pursue his own corrupt interests.

Regional Governor Valery Gayevsky said Wednesday that the fate of the town must be decided by its citizens without interference by activists from other cities, Interfax reported.

That was likely a reference to Dunayev, who is not a Lermontov resident but has worked in other regional towns.

Gayevsky called the upcoming local election "the cure [for] the radicalism of separate pseudo-activists."

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