

Twitter Users Rally Behind St. Pete Whistleblower

April 19, 2012



Tatyana Ivanovna

A former teacher facing a defamation charge from a superior she accused of vote-rigging became a Twitter celebrity on Thursday as sympathizers rushed to voice their support.

A day after her first court hearing in St. Petersburg, Tatyana Ivanova became one of the most-discussed topics among Russian Twitter users, with tweets piling up under the hashtag #ТатьянаИванова throughout the day.

The libel charge stems from an anonymous interview that Ivanova gave to Novaya Gazeta in late January in which she accused city officials of pressuring poll workers to rig the State Duma vote in December in favor of the ruling United Russia party.

She said officials offered bribes and even taught poll workers how to throw the vote by keeping observers far from the ballot boxes, stuffing the boxes and casting ballots on behalf of no-show voters.

Ivanova, who headed the polling station located at her school, said she refused to participate in the scheme and was forced to quit her job after it was determined that she was the anonymous interviewee.

Natalya Nazarova, a district education chief implicated by Ivanova, is demanding 100,000 rubles (\$3,386) in compensation.

A member of the city election commission also named by Ivanova has denied the accusations.

A crowd of supporters greeted Ivanova outside the courthouse on Wednesday, and Twitter users are considering donating money to offset a possible fine.

But Ivanova said she'd already won. "Look at all the people who've reacted and reached out," she told news site Fontanka.ru.

The next hearing is scheduled for April 26.

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