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# Eyewitness Report: Activists Flee From Police Bus After Rally

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September 30, 2012




A protester hanging an anti-Putin poster out of a police bus window. **Yelena Rostunova**

Five people were detained Saturday at an unauthorized rally in support of political prisoners, with three of them managing to flee brazenly from a police bus without being rearrested.

Police said they wanted to quiz the activists about violent anti-Kremlin protests that erupted on May 6, but no one was questioned, and all were released without charges, said Vadim Dergachyov, one of the event's organizers.

"We hold events in support of political prisoners every week," Dergachyov said by phone Sunday. "Their purpose is to constantly attract attention to political repressions and the existence of political prisoners."

The protesters, numbering about 15, initially planned to gather in Alexandrovsky Sad, but police blocked all entrances because of a City Hall organized light show being held on Manezh

Square.

The group changed its meeting place to Manezh Square, and some of the activists put on chains and stuck tape emblazoned with "282" on their mouths, a reference to Article 282 of the Criminal Code, which punishes incitement to racial and ethnic hatred but is believed by the opposition to be a tool of political repression. Some protesters also wore sweatshirts with slogans in support of those charged with participating in the May 6 rally.

Dergachyov said Saturday's rally did not break the law, since there is no ban on wearing chains or sweatshirts with political slogans.

The activists circled around the square, with onlookers and policemen watching them curiously. They then proceeded to Lubyanskaya Ploshchad, passing by the headquarters of the Federal Security Service, a landmark symbol of oppression for the opposition.

The police followed and attempted to stop the group several times, asking them about the purpose of the event. The activists replied that they were just taking a walk.

The protesters moved further to Ilyinskiye Vorota Ploshchad, where the police finally swooped in on them. Four detainees were escorted to a police bus, where they loudly chanted "freedom to political prisoners!"

The bus went to the Kitai Gorod police station, and the remaining activists headed there to support the detainees, as is usual practice at such protests. When the bus arrived there, the detainees talked to passers-by out of the window, explaining to them what they perceived as their illegal detention. One of the protesters who was still free picketed near the bus with a "Putin is a thief" poster, and police promptly escorted her to the vehicle.

As the bus departed from the Kitai Gorod station to take the detainees to the Tverskaya station, a protester hung the poster out of the window. A few minutes later, those inside the bus opened the back door, and three of them fled.

The trio decided to walk to the Tverskaya station. En route, they boldly asked a random police officer to show his badge, saying they were opposition activists checking police badges as part of a protest. Once at the station, they waited outside until the other two activists were released.

Police had no immediate comment Sunday about the detentions.

Dergachyov said the official reason that police gave for the detentions was to question the activists over the May 6 unrest, but in fact no questioning took place. He added that such inquiries had often been used by police as an excuse for detention due to a lack of legitimate grounds.

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