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Yabloko Activist Smashes Printer to Protest Election Bill

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Yabloko leader Sergei Mitrokhin standing next to the smashed printer. **shvetspavel**

A deputy from the liberal Yabloko party smashed a printer with a hammer near the State Duma building Tuesday in what was intended as a protest against a bill that seeks to strengthen the first-past-the-post voting system in regional legislative elections.

Grigory Semyonov, a deputy of the Cheryomushki district's municipal council, was detained after the event, Yabloko leader Sergei Mitrokhin told Interfax. Several other activists also protested near the building.

The State Duma has been called "a crazy printer" by critics who accuse the parliament's lower house of having churned out a large number of repressive bills since its latest election in December 2011.

The bill on regional elections was considered in a second reading on Tuesday. According to the legislation, the minimum number of deputies elected under the party-list proportional system in regional legislatures will be cut from 50 percent to 25 percent, with the rest being

elected under the first-past-the-post system. Moscow and St. Petersburg will be allowed to set these percentages themselves.

The bill has been widely seen by analysts as an attempt by the Kremlin to offset United Russia's decreasing popularity by reducing party-list representation and fielding candidates who don't showcase their connection with the party. Some observers linked the measure to the Moscow City Duma election, scheduled for September 2014, in which the opposition hopes to win a significant share of the seats.

An initiative by opposition parties to team up against United Russia by not running against each other in specific districts has been derailed, however, by the Civil Platform party's decision to field candidates in most districts in the City Duma election. The decision was announced by Civil Platform leader Mikhail Prokhorov at a party congress Monday. In another blow to the initiative, Mitrokhin said Yabloko's talks on an agreement with the liberal RPR-Parnas party about the election had stalled.

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