

Leningrad Blockade Survivor Arrested, Fined For Anti-War Protest

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Russian police detained a 75-year-old survivor of the Nazi siege of Leningrad and fined him 10,000 rubles (\$275) for attending an anti-war rally and holding a sign that read "Peace to the World, while a pro-Kremlin lawmaker reportedly called him a supporter of "fascism."

The activist, Igor Andreyev, was detained at a protest in St. Petersburg against Russia's dispatch of troops to the Crimea. Police held him in custody for nearly 24 hours, before releasing him on Wednesday and ordering him to pay a fine, Novaya Gazeta reported.

Andreyev said he was first accosted by a local lawmaker from the pro-government United Russia party, Vitaly Milonov, who tore a placard that the activist had brought to the rally from his hands, ripped it apart and threw the pieces into a trash can.

"I was telling him that I was a child of the siege, that I know what war is like," Andreyev said.

"Milonov responded: 'You have been reborn, you are supporting fascism.' What does he know about fascism?" Andreyev said.

During World War II, the German army cut off Leningrad — now called St. Petersburg — from Russian lines for 872 days, and hundreds of thousands of people died as famine gripped the city.

"I was four years old, but I remember how buildings crumbled, how we suffered in bomb shelters," Andreyev said.

He said he then took a placard with the handwritten words "Peace for the World" from a woman who seemed too shy to hold up the sign. It was a small and naive placard, he said, similar to what Soviet-era children wrote in elementary school classes.

"I unfolded the placard, and immediately the Omon [riot police] ran up to me, took me by the arms and led me to the police bus," Andreyev said.

After Novaya Gazeta reported that a 10,000 ruble fine was levied on the retiree, who lives on a 6,500-ruble monthly pension, many readers offered to pay the fine, the newspaper said.

Andreyev thanked readers for their support but declined the money, saying he did not want to create the impression that he was getting money for participating in anti-war protests.

Russian officials have accused the West of bankrolling anti-government protests in Ukraine that led to the ouster of former President Viktor Yanukovich in February.

"Every time they take me to the bus with the other detainees, they ask me: 'How much did they pay you, old man?'" he said. "I don't want to give them any grounds to think I might take money."

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