

Opposition Figures Stage Hunger Strike to Protest Prison Sentences

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Opposition leader Sergei Udaltsov waits to attend a court hearing in Moscow July 24, 2014.

Opposition leader Sergei Udaltsov has gone on hunger strike to protest the 4.5-year prison sentence handed down to him Thursday for organizing "riots" during anti-Kremlin protests in 2012 in a verdict that supporters and human rights advocates said was politically motivated.

As soon as the Moscow City Court handed down sentences late Thursday evening to Udaltsov and fellow opposition leader Leonid Razvozzhayev, the activist declared a hunger strike, denouncing the proceedings by saying: "This was not a trial," according to Twitter messages from the opposition account Kasparov.ru. Razvozzhayev was also sentenced to 4.5 years in prison.

Supporters berated what they called a mockery of justice during the process, chanting "Freedom to Udaltsov!" and shouting "Shame!" at the judges as they filed out of the

courtroom, Kasparov.ru said in Twitter messages.

The leader of the Moscow Helsinki Group — the oldest independent human rights organization in Russia — Lyudmila Alekseyeva said: "I consider this verdict politically motivated," Interfax reported.

The May, 2012 rallies on Moscow's Bolotnaya Square erupted in clashes between protesters and the police, and the court ruled in favor of prosecutors, who argued that Udaltsov and Razvozzhayev had accepted pay from Georgian politicians to stage street violence.

But Alekseyeva argued that the staging was done by government forces, Interfax reported.

"All incidents on that day were provoked: People were blocked off from a previously approved route to a demonstration," she was quoted as saying, adding that there were no rioters among protesters.

"According to the Constitution, we have the freedom of rallies, marches and demonstration," Alekseyeva told Interfax. "The story of the 'May 6' case regarding Udaltsov and Razvozzhayev and previous trials is proof that we have virtually nothing left of that freedom."

Opposition politician Ilya Yashin of the Solidarity movement said that the "injustice of this trial is obvious," Interfax reported.

"The number of political prisoners in Russia, sadly, has increased today," he was quoted as saying.

The activists' lawyers said they would appeal, Interfax reported.

Razvozzhayev's lawyer Dmitry Agranovsky said that the two should have been acquitted because there was no actual crime committed on that day in 2012, Interfax reported.

However, he added, "we understand that the punishment could have been more severe," the report said.

See also:

[Opposition Figures Convicted of Organizing Mass Riots at Bolotnaya](#)

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