The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Siberian Activist Threatened With Severed Sheep's Head

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August 18, 2014



Novosibirsk artist Artyom Loskutov.

A severed sheep’s head was found on the doorstep of a Siberian activist who irked local authorities by staging a rally in support of the Russian Constitution’s Article 1, which promotes federalism, local media reported.

The gruesome gift appeared by rally organizer Alexei Baranov's door in Novosibirsk ahead of the March for Inviolability of the Constitutional Order last weekend, Nazaccent.ru said.

'Constitutional' Rally

What appeared on the surface to be a loyalist event in fact aimed to draw attention to a loophole in the Kremlin's Ukraine policy, thus provoking the ire of local officials.

The rally aimed to celebrate Russia's federalist nature — and in doing so, to advocate

for greater Siberian autonomy.

The rhetoric used by organizers closely mirrored that of the Kremlin in urging greater federalism in Ukraine, where pro-Russian rebels have waged a bloody war against Ukrainian government forces.

A separatist movement has existed in resource-rich Siberia since the 19th century, but never dominated regional politics.

A rally in support of Russian federalism was announced in Novosibirsk in late July.

Parody Takes a Serious Turn

The original organizer was Novosibirsk artist Artyom Loskutov, who is well known in the region for staging tongue-in-cheek political provocations aimed at "hijacking" more serious political events. These parody rallies — referred to as Monstrations — were known to emanate such nonsensical slogans as "Who's There?" and "Lentils Are Evil."

Loskutov stayed true to himself: A prospective slogan for the federalism rally depicted a phallic-looking map of western Siberia with the slogan: "Show Siberia to Moscow!"

The Novosibirsk City Hall banned the rally as unconstitutional, and the state Internet watchdog Roskomnadzor went on a near-unprecedented blacklisting spree, banning access to more than a dozen media reports and pages on social networks concerning the rally.

Plans were then overtaken by fringe radical group the National-Bolshevik Platform, which rebranded the march as an event to promote federalism, as guaranteed by Article 1 of the Russian Constitution.

Novosibirsk authorities banned the new rally as well.

"We won't be allowing any events threatening the constitutional order of Russia," Mayor Anatoly Lokot said of the pro-Constitution rally, News.ngs.ru reported Friday.

Clamping Down on Dissent

Organizers have complained via social media accounts and local news interviews of wide-ranging harassment, complete with lengthy questioning sessions and alleged threats by law enforcement officers to plant drugs or stolen cellphones on them unless rally plans were dropped.

Officials also speculated the event was "funded by Ukraine," co-organizer Roman Popkov wrote on his Facebook page.

Following the alleged sheep's head incident, the actual event quickly fizzled out: Only about 15 people rallied in Novosibirsk, BBC Russia said.

Most organizers spent Sunday in detention and were unable to attend, though they were later released without charges, the report said Monday.

Police have not reported any luck in searching for the perpetrators of the sheep head incident.

See also:

Moscow Court Jails 4 More Bolotnaya Activists for Anti-Putin Protest

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Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/08/18/siberian-activist-threatened-with-severed-sheeps-head-a38447