The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Anarchist Russian Farmer to Defend His Village Currency in Court

By Ivan Nechepurenko

June 02, 2015



One kolion equaled 10 kilograms of potatoes.

Mikhail Shlyapnikov, a farmer in the isolated Russian village of Kolionovo, thought he had found a way to make economic transactions in the cash-strapped settlement easier: He began printing *kolions*, exchange notes to be used by villagers instead of cash.

One *kolion* equaled 10 kilograms of potatoes. In a village where residents would only get hard cash several times a year — during harvest and sowing — *kolions* would make the exchange of goods easier. Workers could plow a piece of land for a few *kolions* and then exchange them for vegetables, fruit or fish.

But in his attempt to establish a self-sustaining community with its own system of cashless transactions, Shlyapnikov attracted the attention of the government.

On Wednesday, Shlyapnikov will appear in court facing prosecution for creating his own

currency. The prosecutor claims that by printing his own money, Shlyapnikov aimed to subvert the economic security of the Russian state.

Shlyapnikov, a former Moscow businessman who took up farming about 10 years ago, denies that *kolions* can be called "money," describing them instead as loan receipts. He says that local government officials are simply envious of the media attention he has attracted and want revenge.

"Our local prosecutor is just looking for ways to express himself, I cannot find any other explanation for his actions," Shlyapnikov told The Moscow Times in a phone interview from Kolionovo, which is located about 100 kilometers southeast of Moscow.

The ebullient farmer, who traded in his life as a self-made businessman for that of a farmer in Kolionovo after breaking his back in a car accident and then battling cancer, said he does not believe local prosecutors will put him behind bars.

"In Moscow, officials can get serious, but here they are much more fearful," Shlyapnikov said.

A representative of the Moscow region prosecutor said the agency could not comment before the court issues its ruling.

"We cannot comment on the actions of this prosecutor because the trial is still ongoing. Our comments could be seen as an attempt to pressure the court," Marina Kaurova, a senior assistant to the Moscow region prosecutor, told The Moscow Times.

Regardless of the outcome, the *kolions* case has already made national headlines, with officials from the country's Central Bank calling Shlyapnikov to find out what he was up to. In addition, *kolions* themselves have become a coveted item for collectors, according to Shlyapnikov.

This is not Shlyapnikov's first run-in with the law. Officials previously tried to prosecute the farmer — a devoted follower of Russian revolutionary anarchist Mikhail Bakunin — back in 2010, when in an attempt to resist the government's plans to close a hospital in the village, he was accused of forcibly changing Russia's constitutional order.

With only a handful of people living permanently in the village, the local hospital offered a lifeline for the lonely elders there. Shlyapnikov gathered the other villagers for a meeting at which they voted to impeach the head of the village council.

The case against him fell apart, according to Shlyapnikov, and the hospital is now deserted and dilapidated. Shlyapnikov now makes his own demands of bureaucrats, insisting that any government officials wanting to visit his property show numerous official papers, including the results of a fluorography test for tuberculosis.

"We are a self-sufficient community, have our own self-government and execute state functions," Shlyapnikov said.

"The main thing we are trying to do is develop our own model of survival here," he said.

Contact the author at i.nechepurenko@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/06/02/anarchist-russian-farmer-to-defend-his-village-currency-in-court-a47064