

Russian Journalist Arrested on Suspicion of Extremism

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A journalist working for a prominent Russian news outlet has been placed in pretrial detention over his alleged affiliation with a political group banned in 2010 as extremist, according to the RBC news website.

Moscow's Khamovnichesky District Court denied a request for house arrest Wednesday and ruled that Alexander Sokolov should remain in police custody until Sept. 22 ahead of a likely trial, RBC reported.

Investigators allege that Sokolov and two associates, Valery Parfyonov and Yury Mukhin, continued to implement the program of the radical left-wing People's Will Army despite its prohibition.

Parfyonov and Mukhin, the former leader of the People's Will Army, were also ordered Wednesday to remain behind bars pending the outcome of the investigation. Mukhin, a prominent publicist and campaigner, was detained the day before in the Crimean capital of

Simferopol and transferred to Moscow, the Dozhd TV station reported, citing a friend.

Sokolov, who has written for RBC on issues including depopulation and poverty in the Russian regions, was allegedly involved in organizing propaganda for the group.

Investigators looking into an extremism case conducted searches at the apartments of Sokolov and Parfyonov in February. Sokolov said in a March interview with the opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta that one investigator warned him he was going to lead an "interesting life."

Investigators allege that Sokolov, Mukhin and Parfyonov were engaged in the recruitment of new members and sought funds for a successor organization to the People's Will Army.

The three men are also accused of trying to "change of the current regime by illegal methods," according to court documents published by the OVD-Info site, a human rights project tracking political cases.

"From our side we will appeal this decision. We'll see how the Moscow City Court will respond to our arguments," said Alexei Chernyshev, a lawyer for the men, radio station Kommersant FM reported.

A spokesperson for RBC, where Sokolov works, said that the media group, which is controlled by billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, is looking at the legal basis for their employee's detention, RBC reported.

On its website, which is still accessible despite the ban, the People's Will Army states that its aim is to change the constitution via a referendum. "Every citizen of the Russian Federation is a juror, a member of the court in the trial against the Federal Assembly and the president," reads the group's website.

After the People's Will Army was deemed extremist five years ago, Mukhin and his associates set up an initiative group to campaign for a referendum called "for responsible government."

Mukhin, a neo-Stalinist who has defended the Communist repressions during the 1930s, was given a two-year suspended sentence for incitement to extremism in 2009. The People's Will Army states on its website that it is affiliated with the ROT Front, an umbrella group for left-wing groups set up five years ago.

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