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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Truckers Obstruct Traffic in Nationwide Strike

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Maxim Stulov / Vedomosti

Truck drivers across Russia launched a nationwide strike March 27 aimed at abolishing the country's controversial "Platon" truck tax, in which heavy vehicles are charged tolls on federal highways – supposedly to repair Russia's damaged roads.

Drivers from cities across Russia participated in the strike.

Truckers plan to strike in more than 70 of Russia's regions. The organizers promised to involve over 10,000 trucks who would block major traffic flows.

Embed:

> Стихийная акция дальнобойщиков, прямо сейчас. По их оценкам около 200 грузовиков встали вдоль трассы М7 pic.twitter.com/JvdkpSHun5

— Райхштат Антон (@rayXshtat) March 27, 2017

"A spontaneous protest by some truckers happening right now. According to their estimates, there's about 200 trucks stood along the M7."

Others planned to take part in a "passive strike," by leaving their vehicles in the columns along roads in major cities.

Several of the movement's organizers have since been detained. President of the Russian Association of Carriers Andrew Bazhutin was arrested at his home in St. Petersburg after he went out to protest. He was charged with driving without a license.

The Chairman of the local Tula Interregional Trade Union of Professional Drivers Andrew Vedenin was detained after leaving his home under the pretext of verifying his identity and car insurance policy. According to ATS-info, he was taken to the police department and is still there. Other key activists were arrested in Krasnodar, Chelyabinsk, and Stavropol.

Drivers report that they already pay the fees via fuel and transportation taxes. Activists note that the tax is controlled by a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Embed:

Ох, а здесь приехали дальнобойщики, которые против забастовки. Конфликт. pic.twitter.com/qbyY3riZIt

— Арсений Веснин (@ars_ves) March 27, 2017

"Oh, and now some truckers who are against the protests have arrived. There's conflict."

Drivers argue that the taxes are constraining their incomes and the situation is set to get worse. On April 15, the tax will increase from 1.53 rubles per kilometer ($0.027) to 1.91 rubles ($0.033). The government initially planned to increase the rate to 3.06 rubles ($0.05), but has since abandoned the idea.

This isn't the first time the tax system has caused a backlash. In November 2015, Russian truckers launched a protest against the taxes introduction.

Drivers from different regions gathered in Moscow, where they tried to block the Moscow Ring Road. The government subsequently agreed to reduce the rate but left the system in force.

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