The Moscow Times
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Major Russian Labor Union Disbanded by Court For Foreign Ties

January 11, 2018



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A St. Petersburg court has disbanded one of Russia's largest labor unions over accusations that it received funding from abroad.

The Interregional Labor Union of Automobile Workers (MPRA) was one of Russia's last remaining major unions with 3,000 members across 40 regions. The union gained prominence after staging a 25-day-long strike at a Ford assembly plant outside St. Petersburg in 2007.

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The St. Petersburg City Court ruled in favor of the MPRA's dissolution on Wednesday, siding with the city prosecutor's office.

“The plaintiff cited the organization’s political activity, collection of signatures to change current legislation and foreign funding as arguments for its liquidation,” the ruling said in an online statement.

Prosecutors alleged that the union had received over 32 million rubles ($560,000) from a Swiss-based international union federation to train members, the Vedomosti business daily reported Wednesday.

MPRA's lawyer maintained that funding from the federation, IndustriALL Global Union, totaled a mere $6,000.

Alexei Etmanov, the chairman of the MPRA, said it was too early to declare the association dead and vowed to appeal the decision. He told the opposition-leaning Dozhd television channel that the ruling will not be implemented until the Supreme Court had heard the appeal.

The MPRA warned that the court ruling threatens the existence of all labor unions in Russia.

“The MPRA will do everything it can to ensure that the Supreme Court rescinds this shameful and catastrophic decision,” it said in an online statement published Thursday.

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