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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Protesters Rally Outside State Duma in Moscow Over Pension Reform

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Sergei Udaltsov, the leader of the Left Front, protesting in front of the State Duma on Thursday. **Anton Novoderezhkin / TASS**

Opposition activists and Muscovites gathered on Thursday to protest the government's pension reforms that would see a hike in the country's retirement age.

The plan to raise the pension age was first announced on June 14, the opening day of the World Cup, in what critics say was an attempt to obfuscate the unpopular measure. Since the announcement, opinion polls have seen President Vladimir Putin's approval rating drop to below 50 percent for the first time in five years amid dozens of protests organized across the country against the measure.

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Hundreds gathered on Thursday morning in front of the State Duma as deputies discussed the

bill, which would see the retirement age for men increase from 60 to 65 years and for women from 55 to 63 years.

Protesters wore red ribbons and chanted “shame” at lawmakers passing into the Duma, while deputies from the Communist Party and the Just Russia Party approached the protesters to express their opposition to the bill.

“This is an inhumane trend in our country,” Yury Shaposhnikov, a 59-year-old protester, told The Moscow Times. “A person should have to serve the country for a certain period of time and then be able to have time to themselves. At this age a person isn’t even able to work,” he said.

Sergei Shatsky, a 50-year-old demonstrator, told The Moscow Times that he has been out of a job for two years and that he doesn’t know how he’ll survive until the proposed retirement age of 65 years.

“The deputies should go to the cemeteries and see how many men there are who died at the age of 61 or 62," he said, adding that "seven of my close friends have already died.”

Embed:

> Sergei Shatsky, 50, has been out of a job for two years and says he has no clue how he’d get to proposed 65 retirement age. “The deputies should go to the cemeteries and see how many men there are 61 or 62. Seven of my close friends have already died.” pic.twitter.com/zp3kM8ectg
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> — Evan Gershkovich (@evangershkovich) July 19, 2018

Although there were no reports of arrests in Moscow, dozens of police officers watched the crowd from a distance. A protest on Wednesday in central St. Petersburg saw 17 demonstrators detained, the Media Zona news website reported.

Meanwhile, Sergei Udaltsov, the leader of the Left Front, a leftist organization that staged a sanctioned protest against the reform in Moscow on Wednesday night, told The Moscow Times that he believes “hundreds of thousands” of people would be protesting in the streets by fall once the “euphoria of the World Cup fades away.”

Evan Gershkovich contributed reporting.

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