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Muscovites Who Don't Speak Out Are Giving Tacit Approval to Police Brutality

Whether they like it or not, those who stay at home are supporting the police batons as they come down on the protesters' skulls.

By Oleg Kashin

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Mikhail Tereschenko / TASS

For some reason, everyone is asserting with confidence that a protest rally or even a demonstration took place in Moscow last Saturday, when, in fact, nothing of the kind occurred. There were no columns of people marching, no speeches made, no flags unfurled and no protest leaders (they'd all been imprisoned). There wasn't even a meeting place at which everyone was supposed to gather.

Aside from a designated hour — 2 p.m. on Saturday — there were no signs of an "unauthorized rally," not to mention a larger demonstration.

What actually took place was a major operation by the police that the authorities had announced and advertised widely in advance. It was a security sweep of the city, maneuvers for dispersing a second Maidan, and a demonstration of their technical and physical prowess.

And it was here, at the site of this police action that everyone in the center of Moscow had been told would take place, that several thousand people turned up, ready to become victims of this "mopping up" operation.

They came prepared for the police to beat them with their billy clubs, or arrest them and slap them with serious criminal charges and enough prison time to disrupt their jobs and university studies.

Embed:

> Не, ну это точно перебор!https://t.co/9eOp2tbg4Fpic.twitter.com/PS702PmIhE
>
> — Илья Варламов (@varlamov) August 3, 2019

The sociological point of the event on Saturday was to measure the actual protest mood of the city, and it is safe to say that for every protester who turned up this weekend there were 100 or even 1,000 more who would have marched under ordinary conditions.

This Saturday saw only the most fearless protesters, those with the strongest motivation and the most uncompromising resolve. "You can understate our numbers all you want," they seemed to say, "but you're only fooling yourselves."

In fact, the only number of protesters the authorities will tolerate is "zero."

By their thinking, law-abiding citizens should stay home, do as they're told and avoid getting into a scuffle with the police. Normal people, in their view, should be more interested in saving their own skins than in higher principles.

And if the authorities deploy all the resources at their disposal to keep every last protester off the street, and thousands turn out anyway, it means they have failed to achieve their goal.

Related article: Russian Opposition Plans New Protest Despite Over 1,000 Arrests

In an attempt to cast that failure as a victory, the authorities dream up every manner of nonsense – from charging a blogger with violating Article 282 of the Criminal Code for allegedly threatening the children of police officers, to inflating the number of people who turned out for a last minute state-organized barbecue festival.

It is also worth bearing in mind why people were protesting in the first place — the insignificant, ridiculous, almost meaningless Moscow City Duma elections.

They were not calling for a revolution, for unlimited freedoms or for the overthrow of Russian

President Vladimir Putin. They were not trying to tear down the Kremlin or unleash a wave of ethnic cleansing. It was really a trifling matter. And keep in mind that if 3,000 to 10,000 people were willing to face police batons over a trifle, imagine how many would turn out if something really serious were at stake.

Embed:

> Росгвардия и РосОМОН показали миру, что Путин прочно стоит на своих двоих - Золотове и Колокольцеве. #допускай #Москва #Соболь pic.twitter.com/FfwJgpWygh
>
> — Хэнде Хох (@Hende_hoch) August 3, 2019

The authorities wound up with two contradictory tasks; dispersing the protestors and pretending that no protestors had showed up. In true doublespeak fashion, they found some crazy way to do both.

Of course, those who were beaten and arrested on Saturday are now even more convinced that they are right.

If others who habitually stay at home also feel they are right, that's okay. The authorities won't bother them. Aside from the occasional Facebook post, the quiet ones never have, and probably never will, pose a threat. At this point, they are just part of the scenery.

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What has really changed is the position of loyal citizens. After this Saturday, they inevitably find themselves lending tacit support to police brutality, to patriotism administered with a stick. No doubt these moderate loyalists among the population sincerely believed that their government had good intentions, but police brutality shattered that illusion on Saturday.

Now they will have to invent a crime that would justify all this beating, and maintain that lie to stay loyal.

Well-meaning Russians who, say, help sick children, work in the theater or design public spaces must now find a way to justify this unmotivated violence, this shameless sadism.

They don't even need to voice that rationale, they can simply think it.

But in doing so, they become one with that police baton as it comes down on a protester's skull. There is no stopping this process once it is set in motion.

For many, It is not all that disturbing when the police go after opposition leaders, as they did at Bolotnaya Square in 2011 and 2012. Half the population had no interest in those opposition figures and their speeches anyway.

But now that those opposition forces have been neutralized and the police keep coming down on people, they are coming down on the ordinary people.

This time, the authorities took to the streets in a rampage of unmotivated cruelty, choosing to side with evil.

This piece was originally published *by Republic.*

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