The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Football Fans Stage Mass Walkout Over Police Crackdown

By Daniel Kozin

December 09, 2019



Zenit's entire fan sector left Gazprom Arena on the 40th minute of a Premier League match with FC Dynamo Moscow, leaving a banner that said "Fans aren't criminals" on the empty stands. **Alexander Demyanchuk / TASS**

Thousands of Russian football fans staged a walkout at games over the weekend following a recent police crackdown on hooliganism, in what observers say was the largest coordinated fan action in Russian football history.

FC Spartak Moscow's Fratria fan group called for the walkout after police detained an estimated 90 fans in St. Petersburg before a Dec. 1 match between Spartak and FC Zenit. Observers said many of the arrests were arbitrary, with police detaining dozens of people outside bars and hotels after seeing them with Spartak football scarves. St. Petersburg police later said that the measure was aimed at preventing planned street clashes between rival fan groups.

Embed:

> #ЗенитДинамо Вираж в начале матча и на 40-й минуте pic.twitter.com/WFt18Cuc6D
>
> — СЭ Футбол (@se_football) December 6, 2019

In a rare show of solidarity, fans of 14 out of Russia's 16 top-tier football clubs — including fans of Spartak's archrivals Zenit and CSKA Moscow — joined in the walkout at games over the weekend.

On Friday, Zenit's entire fan sector left Gazprom Arena on the 40th minute of a Premier League match with FC Dynamo Moscow, leaving a banner that said "Fans aren't criminals" on the empty stands.

"We want to bring attention to a well-known problem: When a fan arrives from a different country [to Russia] for the World Cup or European Championship, he is treated like a welcome guest, while Russian fans are treated like criminals," the Landscrona group of Zenit fans wrote in a post announcing that they would join the walkout.

Other fan groups noted that the crackdown against the Spartak fans was the latest in a string of mass detentions and raids over the past year against fans of different clubs — including Lokomotiv Moscow, Zenit, Spartak and CSKA.

"We call on ALL fans to show their opposition to what is happening, to show support for all fans who have been detained illegally and to clearly show what football will look like without those who law enforcement has been fighting so actively against," Fratria explained in its announcement of the walkout.

In total, St. Petersburg courts handed fines to an estimated 30 fans detained in the crackdown before the Zenit-Spartak match. Another three fans were placed under administrative arrest for nine days, while a Spartak fan leader was banned from attending football matches for 18 months for leading obscene chants at the game in St. Petersburg.

The Fontanka.ru news website reported that the verdicts against the detained fans were based on near-identical testimonies from police officers, who said the fans had sworn in public and disturbed the public peace.

Some Russian bloggers have compared the court verdicts to the case against Russian blogger Yegor Zhukov, who was given a two-year suspended sentence last week for online videos calling for nonviolent protests.

"In both cases, the court decided that individuals can be sentenced for their words, not their actions. In both cases, the goal was to spread fear," blogger Alexander Polivanov wrote.

Meanwhile on Monday, Zenit fans reportedly received messages on social media from anti-extremism police warning that law enforcement would continue to crack down on fans to

prevent clashes.

“The 90s and 2000s are long over, and with them ended the ‘hooliganism’ that some deranged individuals got used to,” a message posted by Fontanka said.

“We would like to disappoint you: This is how it will be from now on!” the message said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/12/09/russian-football-fans-stage-mass-walkout-over-police-crackdown-a68527