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Pro-Putin Corporate Culture Behind Viral 'Flashmob' Videos

By Uliana Pavlova

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Sima Land employees sparked a new trend of pro-Putin videos amid nationwide protests. **Screenshot Youtube**

In a recent video that quickly went viral on Russian social media, thousands of employees can be seen cheering, waving Russian flags and lining up to form letters that spell "Putin is our president" when viewed from above.

The video, filmed in the parking lot at the Sima Land e-commerce company's Yekaterinburg headquarters, ends with employees cheerfully screaming the slogan in support of President Vladimir Putin.

Embed:

> «Сима-ленд» снова провел в Екатеринбурге масштабный... нет,

> МАСШТАБНЫЙ флешмоб: несколько тысяч сотрудников компании выстроили в надпись «Путин — наш президент»
> pic.twitter.com/oCp8mdE7Hp
>
> — Znak.com (@znak_com) February 5, 2021

Video from the ground paints a different picture. Employees filmed themselves awkwardly standing in lines, holding red cardboard pieces on their heads and occasionally shouting "Putin is our president," lacking the same enthusiasm as in the final clip.

Amid unprecedented protests criticizing Putin and Russia's ruling elite as well as calling for the release of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, Sima Land has organized massive "flashmobs" where thousands of employees sing patriotic songs and chant pro-Putin slogans.

The latest clip came days after a record number of Russians were detained at the pro-Navalny protests in one of the most brutal crackdowns on peaceful protesters in years, leading many to comment that the "flashmobs" were part of a Kremlin strategy to drown out anti-Putin sentiment. The Kremlin has denied involvement in the videos.

Many of those detained at the protests were charged with violating coronavirus-related restrictions against mass gatherings and taking part in unauthorized rallies. Meanwhile, thousands of Sima Land employees were filmed walking in close proximity to each other, even though many wore face masks.

For the latest video, Sima Land's leadership announced that they were looking for about 6,000 employees to participate in a video performance without giving further detail. However, the event's patriotic pretense was quite clear, according to one current employee who spoke to The Moscow Times on condition of anonymity.

Related article: Pro-Kremlin Media Airs Putin-Praising 'Flashmob' Performance

The patriotic culture at Sima Land comes from the top down — mainly from its CEO and founder Andrei Simanovsky, according to news reports and the employee.

Every work day begins with the Russian national anthem blasting from the office's speakers, with all employees required to stand and place their hand over their heart, the employee said. Prospective employees are asked questions about their patriotic attitudes during the interview process.

The Sima Land corporate campus also regularly hosts events featuring the Kremlin's favorite spin doctor Vladimir Solovyev, United Russia deputies and pro-Putin celebrities, the employee said.

Just a week prior, hundreds of Sima Land employees appeared in another pro-Putin viral video where they marched and danced in military-style uniforms to patriotic Russian pop songs. Critics on social media compared the clip to a North Korean parade.

Simanovsky himself has denied a link between his company's videos and the recent protests.

Sima Land's "flashmob" has nonetheless caught on, with the Industrial Rubber Goods Factory in the Siberian city of Barnaul filming a nearly identical video featuring the same patriotic song and ending by shouting: "Putin is our president."

Embed:

> Обычно про такое пишут "AAAAAAAAAA".
>
> Компания "Сима-ленд" выпустила невероятно эпичный ролик. С социальной дистанцией там проблемы, зато с патриотизмом - никаких. pic.twitter.com/ylX4z7FP8s
>
> — E1.RU News (@e1news) January 28, 2021

In the southern Russian city of Volgograd, teachers, medical workers, factory workers and more were filmed taking part in a similar march. The video, which participants told news outlets had been presented to them as a video dedicated to the Battle of Stalingrad, ends with the slogan: "We are with you, Vladimir Vladimirovich!"

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