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Leftist Groups Across Russia Stage Protests Against Telegram, WhatsApp Call Blocking

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A group of protesters in the city of Voronezh. **Social media**

In a rare display of state-authorized dissent, left-wing groups in several Russian cities are holding protests against government restrictions on voice and video calls through WhatsApp and Telegram.

The protests come after Russia's state communications watchdog Roskomnadzor announced last month that it was throttling calls on the two messaging apps in order to "counter criminal activity."

Demonstrators from Marxist-Leninist groups not affiliated with the official, state-approved Communist Party argue that the restrictions violate their constitutional right to freedom of communication.

The first protest was held on Sunday in the southwestern city of Voronezh, where an

estimated 80 people gathered after the local Organization of Voronezh Marxists successfully obtained a permit. Demonstrators also voiced their opposition to Max, a state-backed messaging app promoted as a domestic alternative to WhatsApp and Telegram.

The Russian Communist Party (of Internationalists), another Marxist group, announced plans for similar protests this coming Sunday in the Siberian and Far East cities of Novosibirsk, Omsk and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. To date, only the authorities in Omsk have granted them permission. The group is still awaiting authorization from Moscow officials for a demonstration planned for Sept. 13.

The official Communist Party, which holds a minority of seats in Russia's parliament, staged its own protests against call restrictions last month in Novosibirsk.

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