

**Join the international solidarity campaign
for Alexander Kolchenko**

Autonomous Workers Union

March 9, 2015

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Alexander Kolchenko is a Crimean anarchist, social activist and antifascist who is held in captivity by the Russian authorities. Along with other Crimean activists, he has been kidnapped by the Russian FSB (ex-KGB) and is now detained as a political hostage in Lefortovo jail in Moscow. He is charged with committing “acts of terrorism” and “belonging to a terrorist community”.

Why is Alexander Kolchenko in jail?

Alexander, who has undeniably proved his antifascist stance over many years, is facing preposterous accusations of belonging to “Right Sector”, a radical Ukrainian right-wing organization, whose real role in Ukrainian events is blown out of proportion by Russian official propaganda.

In modern Russia any activist — left-wing, anarchist or liberal — can be slandered as a member or sympathizer of “Right Sector”. This situation is comparable to the hunt for nonexistent “Trotskyists” under Stalin, or the McCarthy witch-hunt for communists. Putin’s authoritarian and nationalist regime, which uses in its propaganda everything from religious prejudices and conspiracy theories to outright racism, shamelessly steals “antifascist” rhetoric. And yet anyone who is considered bothersome is called a “fascist”, even if he/she stands on the opposite side of the political spectrum.

The case against antifascist Alexander Kolchenko and civil activist and film director Oleg Sentsov (investigators enrolled them into the same “terrorist” group) is political. It is meant to intimidate inhabitants of Crimea and prevent any resistance on the peninsula. The most authoritarian of methods are now used in annexed Crimea to repress all discontent. Many people were obliged to leave Crimea because their life and freedom were threatened: lawyers, left-wing activists, students and trade union activists, anarchists, antifascists and Crimean Tatar activists who have fallen victims of ethnic discrimination.

What threats does Alexander Kolchenko face?

A terrible prison sentence of up to 20 years threatens Alexander Kolchenko for a non-existent “terrorist attack” in which he was not involved. Kolchenko and other Ukrainian political prisoners are detained only in order to demoralize opposition by show trials. Their freedom is directly linked to the stability of the Putin regime: if we can shake the confidence of Putin in his impunity, the prisoners will be set free. There is no hope that Kolchenko, Sentsov and others would be judged by the law. Their arrest was unlawful, the charges against them are far-fetched. It’s not a mistake, the regime knows what it’s doing.

How can you help Alexander Kolchenko?

We’re asking international left-wing and libertarian forces for help. You can organize and lead actions of protest and solidarity, write letters to Kolchenko, send donations for lawyers and food parcels, help his family. It is also important to spread information about his case. Most of all, we need to dissociate ourselves from any forces that support aggressive expansion of Russian nationalism, even if they cover it up with “leftist” and “anti-imperialist” rhetoric. Putin’s regime is doing just fine without your sympathy, better save it for those who have become its victims.

When to start?

You can start right now by helping us to spread this text, translating it into other languages and sending it to comrades. We also strongly encourage you to organize demonstrations in support of Alexander Kolchenko and other political prisoners jailed in Russia from April 1 to 7, 2015. On April 11 and 16 Sentsov's and Kolchenko's custodies end, respectively. In the first half of April Lefortovo District Court of Moscow will decide again whether they should await judgment in jail or have the right to exit under the injunction not to leave or under home arrest. Only strong and massive pressure on the Putin regime, protests around the world would give a chance to set our comrades free. We demand their immediate discharge and the end of their prosecution.

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