

Illustration: Nastya Golikova for OVD-Info

15.02.2024, 20:16

ARTICLES

# **The lecture's in session, everyone on the floor! The Russian police have raided a communist event and beat its attendees with batons**

**On December 1 Russian law enforcement stormed a communist meeting taking place in a Moscow business centre. Participants were beaten and tortured, some were arrested on made-up charges. OVD-Info spoke with the victims, here's what happened.**

## ОБ ЭТОМ НИКТО НЕ УЗНАЕТ

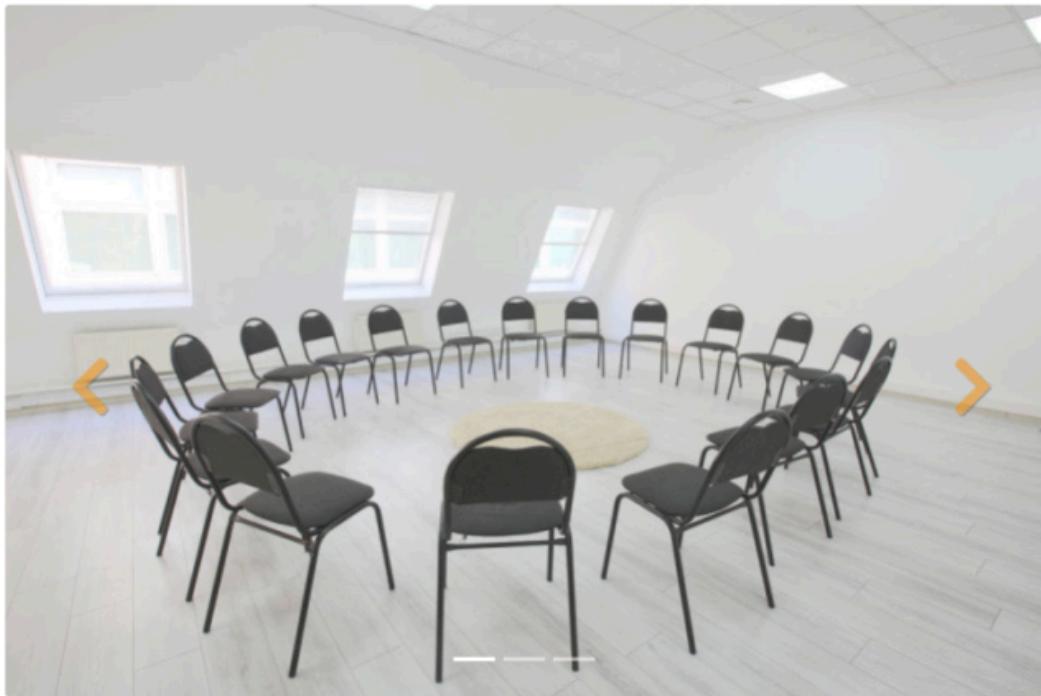
Если об этом никто не напишет. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы плохие дела не оставались в тишине.

**ПОДПИСАТЬСЯ**

### *Текст на русском*

Near the end of autumn the Internationalist Communist Organisation — a very small Marxist organisation in Russia — announced on VKontakte (Russia's Facebook Equivalent) that a discussion event, «Transitional demands as a tool of political struggle for revolution», was to be held in Moscow on 1 December. A lecture and brief discussion was to be expected. The venue was not publicly disclosed and registered participants received the address only at the last moment.

Around 20 people had gathered in the conference room — emphatically named «Integration» — by the time the conference began. The lecturer began with introductions, but was soon interrupted. Special Police from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, clad in riot gear, burst through the door. Following them were several officers from the so-called Center for Combating Extremism, still in plain clothes.



## Интеграция



Площадь

55 м<sup>2</sup>



Вместимость

50 чел.



Цена

от 1 700 ₽/час

📍 Павелецкая 3 мин.

Уютный и просторный зал для проведения тренингов и мероприятий.

*Rental listing of the «Integration» conference room reads: «Cosy and spacious room for training and events» / Screenshot from loft2rent.ru*

«The door burst open and police rushed into the room, shouting „Get down!“ Soon there were more police officers than participants. We were all thrown to the floor face down», recalls Ivan, one of the visitors to the lecture, (all names in the publication save the lawyers have been changed for the victims' safety).

According to Ivan, the security forces humiliated attendees as much as possible. They walked between the rows of people on the floor, randomly kicking them. Then they demanded that they show their ID and unlock their phones. Most of this was done in shouting, but they also used physical force and a stun gun. They insulted many for their

appearance, including a trans-woman for her LGBTQ+ identity.

«They pinned us to the wall and beat our legs and ribs with batons. They beat everyone, but especially those who refused to unlock their phones. The speaker was beaten the most brutally, to the point where he couldn't stand up», recalls Ivan.

According to Ivan, 6 policemen took turns beating the speaker's legs. When he asked them to call him an ambulance, they mockingly offered to call from his unlocked phone.

Ivan also noted that people were pinned to the wall and beaten for any attempt to assert their rights or «disobey» the police. One person, who tried to raise his elbows on the floor to get more comfortable, was beaten. The police forced those on the wall to spread their legs wide apart and put their arms behind their backs, with their hands turned out.

«They pinned people to the wall and bent their heads so that they couldn't look around. In my peripheral vision I saw how people were beaten and heard them crying. The degree of cruelty varied and, to my understanding, depended on orders from the officers in civilian clothing. They checked our messages, particularly our Telegram chats». — reports another victim, Timofei.

## **THREATS OF «THE CELLAR»**

When officers took particular interest in the participants' messages, they were led into adjacent rooms «for a chat». They were forced to cooperate under the threat of violence. According to eyewitnesses, a stun gun was used at least once.

«They took me to a different room and made me sit on the ground. I had to put my hands on my knees and look down». says Val, one of the attendees. «If you speak, they shout

at you. They constantly insulted us, calling us “fuckwads» and «idiots». They asked how I knew about the event and said someone else had snitched on me. The person who mentioned my name was brought in and they cross-examined us. They told the other guy that I snitched on him. They called him a paedophile, and said they'd instantly find proof on his phone. Throughout the whole interrogation they tried to force us to denounce each other.

Meanwhile, several policemen kept beating the speaker, while he screamed loudly. The police took Val from the floor and threatened to bring him to the station and put him in «the cellar». There, they would torture him for hours on end. They threatened to «ruin his entire life». Eventually, Val — who has a medical disability — felt his legs start shaking. Unable to withstand the tension, he fell to the floor.

«They picked me up abruptly and pinned my head to the wall. One of the policemen choked me with one hand and used the other to punch me in my kidneys. They sat me on my knees against the wall, then spread my legs and hands across the wall. I told them I couldn't stand because of my disability, but they ignored me», he recalled.

According to Val, they tortured him because he couldn't remember his password to his Gosuslugi.ru account, which allows individuals to see information about state and municipal services in Russia. The officers wanted to access his account «to reference the data».

This went on for more than an hour. The policemen finally wrote down each member's official data, took a photo of each, and sent most of them home. The speaker sustained the most injuries, pictured below.



*Hematomes on the legs of the speaker. Photo: Internationalist Communist Organisation*

## **DISOBEDIENCE TO VIOLENCE**

Four of the victims were detained by the Siloviki (a colloquial term for the Russian police) and subjected to further torture. They were taken away on the pretence of a drug test, but were brought to the police station. Two of them were released, the other two accused of «disobedience of the police».

«From my point of view, everything that happened on 1st December is, at the very least, a clear abuse of official power. Beating the detainees is a crime. The officers' actions were unlawful, as was the raid on the lecture itself», says Oscar Chardziev, a lawyer from OVD-Info.

According to the defence, both individuals are determined to have the cases dropped. The preliminary hearing took place on 6 December. After studying the documents, the Zamoskvoretsky District Court of Moscow **returned the protocols** and instructed to have the officers re-interrogated, «clarifying, in detail, the circumstances of the incident».

According to Cherdziev, the protocols are nothing but «fluff», consisting of empty words and blank statements. They claim the lecture attendees disobeyed the police and used obscene language, but have no evidence.

«There's nothing surprising about this; the protocols contain nothing but lies. Plenty of witnesses can confirm this. I also sent a lawyer to the building owners where they held the conference, requesting footage from the venue. Despite a preliminary agreement with the building's staff, they denied our request and asked us to mail them by „Russian Post“», explained Cherdziev. «Later, they claimed the cameras weren't working that day».

## THE END TO THE REVOLUTION

Those involved in the disrupted event believe that the police raid violates the constitutionally guaranteed right of citizens to «assemble peacefully and without weapons».

«I sustained no physical injuries, beyond a few bruises, but the moral damage is enormous. The discussion event was completely legal and harmless, but we nevertheless found ourselves under police batons. For the first time I can remember, the police are cracking down on discussion groups, which have always been a big part of my life. So now this is illegal too? What's next?» laments Ivan.

«I've got the feeling that this was just to intimidate anyone „not loyal enough“ to the regime. Even those who discuss mildly „inconvenient“ or „political“ topics are potential targets. It's hard to understand it any other way, especially since those detained weren't charged with any serious violations. All of this makes me feel very uneasy», comments Grigory, one of the organisers of the event.

According to Cherdziev, the «eshniks» (slang name for the officers from the Center for Combating Extremism) and

police are instructed to suppress any form of political protest, even peaceful ones. Any police violence and abuse of authority is ignored by high-ranking officials.

The victims of the incident don't intend to file complaints, as facing the Center for Combating Extremism can get them in even more trouble.

*Fidel Agumava*

## **ЧТО Я МОГУ С ЭТИМ СДЕЛАТЬ?**

Прочитать, рассказать, поддержать. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы как можно больше людей узнали о политических репрессиях в России сегодня.

**ПОДДЕРЖАТЬ**

## **Ещё почитать**



**Democratic Russia? Historian explains what led to fizzling out of Russia's grassroots tradition**