



Vladimir Kiselev / Photo from personal archive

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ARTICLES

## **“An undesirable person.” This factory mechanic was fired for protesting against the war**

Vladimir Kiselyov is from Nizhny Novgorod, an old city in western Russia. Vladimir worked at the local Sokol aircraft plant, traveled the world, and occasionally attended rallies. Then coworkers reported Vladimir for tearing off posters calling for donations to the Russian military. We publish Vladimir’s story about what has happened to him. We are grateful to the [@Astrapress](#) Telegram channel for their help in preparing this article.

## 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*

I was never detained at rallies, but there was the incident with Navalny. Was it 2021 when they imprisoned him? There were mass protests across Russia. I wanted to go and joined a group in VKontakte (Russia's version of Facebook) to know when it was supposed to start. It turns out that our management was monitoring this. I was summoned to a senior manager. He told me: «You seem to be a smart guy, yet you're going to go to a rally.» I said I hadn't made up my mind yet. He said: «There is information that if people come to a rally for Navalny, NATO will send troops to Russia.» And he kept babbling some other nonsense. I came out of his office and realized I had to attend the rally.

I feel like around 80% of the people in Nizhny Novgorod are for the war, while 20% are against it. My parents support the war, even though my mother was born in Lviv, Ukraine. I try my best to convince them, but to no avail. I made a «guesstimate» watching my friends. Those with a job and a country house within the same city, who travel to the seaside once every five years, as well as those above 50 years old—all of them are for the war. However, the ones who actively travel and have active interests in life share the opposite view.

I deliberately split my vacation time and travel somewhere during the May and New Year's Holidays. [There are long public holidays in Russia in January and May. Depending on the year, they can last for up to two weeks.] I mostly visit

Europe and particularly love the Czech Republic and Italy.  
Overall, I have already visited 50 countries.



Vladimir Kiselyov and his giraffe during their journey / Photo taken from Vladimir's personal files

My social circle is more or less okay and is mainly against the war. However, around 90% of my coworkers support it. The only people against the war at work are me and one other guy, but he keeps silent. He spoke out once, and that's it. There are a couple of doubters. There is a lady who hates the authorities for the pension reform and, in principle, does not support anything. [In 2018, the Russian pension reform led to countrywide protests.] She would have been happy with Putin had she been allowed to retire three years earlier.

Initially I worked as a process engineer for ten years after graduation. Then there was a layoff. I was supposed to be fired, but instead, I was transferred to the workshop as a mechanic. It was a shock for me—I used to print documents on a computer, and now I was supposed to knock with a hammer in the cold. I thought it would last for six

months at best. But I ended up working there for four years and wasn't able to get transferred. In the end, I got used to it.

I'm a fairly well-known person at the plant. I am active and participate in all events. We have a plant youth council, and I used to publish its newspaper, organize intellectual contests, and take part in tourist meetings and union events. I think we could have sorted it all out easily with the management, yet they made a scandal.

In the spring [of 2022], when the letters Z just appeared, I got a call from a local youth council—they asked me to come to a flashmob. I didn't ask what kind of flashmob it was, I just went. They started aligning us and I asked: «What is going on?» They said: «Look, we are going to take a roof photo of people standing in the shape of the letter Z.» I said: «Hm, no, bye.»

Later on, in September, I was in Europe, and one of the pictures [I took there] aroused the interest of our plant's security service, but it didn't go further than that. Though they did show me a very thick folder with information about me they had collected. I have a small giraffe plushie that I take with me on my travels. It has its own Instagram account called «Giraffe Girafoff» with pictures of it in different countries. The security staff printed out all the pictures from that account and put them in the folder. I looked at all that and asked them: «Is this some kind of a joke?» They replied: «No, this is all for real!»

Then they asked me to explain the meaning of some of the descriptions underneath the photographs. I told them: «Go ask that animal.» I just couldn't believe it. I understand why they wanted to collect information about me, but about a plushie with but three followers on Instagram...



Giraffe Giraffoff / Picture taken from Giraffe Giraffoff's social media account

In October, posters began to appear at the plant. We have a special stand where they place various information from the management and the union. Usually the information is about some social events, but at that time they announced that they had started collecting money for the needs of the military and wrote that the union had already donated 100,000 rubles (app. US\$1,294).

I didn't like it, as I was a union member as well. I told them that every month they deducted some money from my salary for the needs of the union but they never asked whether I approved my money being spent on such needs. They said to me that I was a nobody and that such questions got decided without me. So I told them I wanted to leave the union. They replied that I had to go talk to the head of the

union and ask him to exclude me. But that would have been a long process and I didn't want to even start.

Then I decided to start quietly tearing the posters down. After I did it the first time, it took them about ten days to put up new ones. Then they did it again, and I again tore them down. I tore them down maybe five times, and no one saw me; there was no CCTV camera near that stand.

But at some point they realized it was me. A lady from the union came yelling at me and threatened that if I ever did that again, they'd fire me. We shouted at each other a bit but I stopped touching the leaflets again.

I was often arguing with that lady. In summer, the union started collecting money for the war. She agitated for such donations but I always refused to take part. She told me I was heartless and greedy. We quarreled time and again, but it was just between the two of us, with no consequences. I guess that's how she figured out it was me who kept tearing the posters down.

Some time later, my boss called me to his office. «Sign here, a reprimand for you, you cursed at the workplace.» That woman had snitched on me. It was just a reprimand, and I wasn't fined. Then in mid-December, they told me that the police had come to interview witnesses in my case. It turned out that the plant had sent a complaint about me to the police. About six people signed it saying they saw me tearing down the posters and saying bad things about our military.

I was told there was going to be a criminal case against me, so I quickly packed up and left. I was supposed to go to work on January 9, 10, and 11, and then I was planning to go on vacation. It was only in mid-January that I learned that the case was administrative, not criminal, so I decided to come back. But at the plant they treated my absence on January 9–11 as unauthorized and later fired me. Even

though I had notified them that I would be taking unpaid leave.

In mid-January I returned to work, and on the very first day the police turned up at the plant. There were lots of them, masked, just about every kind of law enforcement except, as if they had come to detain some dangerous criminal. They showed their IDs, read to me my rights, put me into a police car, and took me to the local police department.



The "Sokol" plant / Screenshot taken from Google Maps

A district police officer came to me and explained the reasons for my detention. In about two hours we were off to a court. And he said to me: «You should confess. You have no previous convictions, this is your first time in court, you will get a minimum sentence. If you say that this is all lies, they will get witnesses, and they may say some unnecessary stuff. And after you confess, you may think it over and appeal.» I decided to confess and got fined 30,000 rubles (app. US\$390).

I asked the judge: «May I know who reported me?» The judge read aloud a list of names, some of which were surprising to hear. Their testimonies were almost identical, clearly not

written by themselves. These people are my colleagues, we work together...

The main snitch was the head of the workshop. Then there was this lady from the union. Three other people from the list work in the same workshop as me—two mechanics and one welder. The welder's booth is pretty far from where everything happened, but he doesn't like me and decided to tag along with the denouncement. And one other snitch, a weird one, I don't know him. Maybe he works in another workshop.

The next day I came to work a bit angry with them. First I, rudely of course, asked the two guys why they had done it. Why did they have to report me? In a couple of hours the police showed up again: those two had reported me to the police for threatening them with murder. Even though I only threatened to punch them in the face, nothing more. There was no talk of murder, of course.

Still, the police took me to the station again and there was the same district officer. He asked laughing: «Why did you even go to the plant? They will try to get rid of you by any means. Don't go there anymore.» Then he wrote a refusal to initiate criminal proceedings—he turned out to be an okay cop after all.

The next day I still went to work and was rather calm. During lunch break they came to fire me; they even brought security and several HR guys with them. They must have thought I was dangerous. The papers were ready within an hour. I said I wouldn't sign anything. They did it all for me, and I was fired on February 1.

After I got fired I got sick with Covid, and my sick leave ended just a few days ago. I'm thinking what to do next. I'll have to start looking for a job... But the plant has blacklisted me. And now any HR from any Nizhny Novgorod company will see my profile photos in their database. And the description will

be that I'm an undesirable person and that it's better to not employ me.

I still haven't decided what to do next. For now I just want to have a bit of rest. I have also sued the plant for firing me but I'm under no illusion that I have a chance of winning.

## **ЧТО Я МОГУ С ЭТИМ СДЕЛАТЬ?**

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**ПОДДЕРЖАТЬ**

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