

Pussy Riot Plans New Anti-Putin Protests

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The  **Moscow Times**

Punk band Pussy Riot said it is planning new protest performances against President Vladimir Putin and urged other women to don balaclavas and stage demonstrations, in spite of a trial at which three bandmates could be jailed.

The trial of Yekaterina Samutsevich, 30, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, 22, and Maria Alyokhina, 24, has merely strengthened the band's resolve, members of the group who are not on trial told Reuters.

They spoke during an interview at which the all-women group donned balaclavas and brightly colored tights like those worn by their three bandmates during the protest on the altar of a Russian Orthodox cathedral that led to their arrest.

"Three wonderful girls who were an inspiration for this group are in prison right now," said one member, going by the name of Button and clad in a thick army green balaclava to guard her identity.

“It is hard for us without them. We feel it, but it means only one thing: We should be even stronger, maybe even bolder.”

They gave no details of the performances they are planning but said they hoped to inspire others to launch their own protests.

“Please put your balaclavas on. I would like to urge other girls: Put your balaclavas on, go out on the street, to work, to your office, to the shop, go to the theater in your balaclava, become a Pussy Riot. Stage your own riot,” one of the other young women said.

Clad in rainbow colors, the women smoked, fidgeted with their makeshift balaclavas and laughed during a break from a cover shoot for a U.S. news magazine.

A few have been members of the political protest group since it was formed last year in reaction to Putin’s decision to return to the presidency, the post he held from 2000 to 2008.

But others of the seven who spoke to Reuters said they had been inspired to join by the arrest of three of Pussy Riot’s founders over their profanity-laced performance on Feb. 21 deriding Putin’s close ties with the Russian Orthodox Church.

“We made our choice. Of course there is danger, and we feel it. Obviously, we want to avoid any bad situations in the future, but I’m afraid that every one of us — it is quite scary — is ready for such consequences,” said one of the women in a striped balaclava and red dress.

Pussy Riot’s case has been taken up by global pop stars including Madonna, who donned a black balaclava during a concert in Moscow last week to show solidarity with the band and called for their release.

“It is really strange to talk about because until this wave of support formed, it wasn’t prestigious but provocative, it was dangerous” to be a part of Pussy Riot, said one member, “Mother,” dressed in a pink balaclava and orange dress.

“Now there are very many Pussy Riots all over the world, people who are donning balaclavas and giving us support.”

For the women, the masks are vital to keeping their anonymity during protests they have staged on the subway, near a prison and on a trolleybus.

“The idea of Pussy Riot is that you can’t arrest us all and there will be more and more of us,” one member said.

While many of the band members say the judiciary is not independent and fear the worst from Friday’s verdict, the threat of jail has not deterred them.

“Initially there was desire, a very strong desire to become part of Pussy Riot. That was some sort of dream of mine. I didn’t even know how real it could be, how I could join those awesome girls and be close to them,” said Button.

“Then it all somehow happened. ... It was so cool. It is just happiness. For me, it is just one big chunk of happiness to be a Pussy Riot girl.”

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