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New Issue of Russian Art Activist Newspaper Chto Delat Confiscated and Under Investigation . 1

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Translation David Riff and Thomas Campbell

PETERSBURG, August 29, 2008. On the evening of August 27, the new issue of the newspaper *Chto Delat* (No. 19: What Does It Mean to Lose? The Experience of Perestroika) was confiscated during a militia raid at the printers in Petersburg.

The raid on the printer's workshop was connected to an earlier incident, when a Petersburg activist was arrested by Petersburg militia at the gates of the Kirov Factory for handing out a flyer to workers. The flyer aroused suspicion because it contained material critical of the Russian-Georgian conflict, and the militia raided the printer's workshop at which the flyer had been produced, where they discovered the most recent edition of *Chto Delat*. They confiscated the entire edition of 3,000 newspapers and detained *Chto Delat* editor Dmitry Vilensky for questioning.

"The situation really did look pretty absurd," says Vilensky. "We produced this issue for the U-Turn Quadriennial in Copenhagen, and it's one of the most artsy issues we've made so far; it contains almost no references to the current political situation." Instead, the issue is dedicated to the problematic of perestroika, whose hopes and outcome the authors subject to critical enquiry. The security officials' suspicion was aroused by the "political look" of the paper and, in particular, by the libretto of a film-opera by the *Chto Delat* work group, to be premiered at U-Turn later next week, in which a nationalist, a democrat, a revolutionary, and a businessman debate the fate of the Soviet Union and its present outcome. The full text of the screenplay can be found [here](#).

Yesterday, Vilensky was informed by the Petersburg militia that the case had been handed over to the Kirov district attorney's office to investigate whether the newspaper is in violation of the Russian constitution, which contains paragraphs against extremism and the incitement of ethnic and religious hatred. "The militia - who told me that they 'didn't want blood' - were quite surprised by this move," Vilensky says. "They told me that the signal came from the FSB official who was coordinating the raid on the printers." The entire edition is still in custody, and will not be distributed at U-Turn, where it was meant to be part of a video-installation.

The printer's workshop Polyarnaya Zvezda [Pole Star] has since been cordoned off as a crime scene, and all its employees questioned. It was one of the only remaining places in Petersburg to print opposition leaflets of a wide range, including the Petersburg issue of National Bolshevik organ *Limonka*. Its closure - and the seizure of what is perhaps *Chto Delat*'s most politically innocent issue - is symptomatic of the new atmosphere of suspicion and fear that has arisen in Russia.