

Stalin Notebooks to Be Sold to Children

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Sergei Porter

A company that produces children's notebooks with pictures of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin on the cover has refused to withdraw them despite harsh criticism from members of the Public Chamber, RIA-Novosti reported Monday.

"Why would we withdraw such a successful product?" said Artyom Bilan, art director of publishing company Alt.

The notebooks are to be sold by Alt as part of its Great Names series, which features figures like historical war heroes Mikhail Kutuzov and Georgy Zhukov.

Public Chamber member Sergei Volkov compared the notebooks with Stalin's image to swastikas.

"I have not seen these notebooks, but if it's true, it is some kind of wildness, because however you relate to this individual, no one can deny the fact that Stalin killed a lot of people. If on school notebooks there is a picture of this man, then, in my opinion, this is akin to Hitler's swastika," Volkov said.

Television host and Public Chamber member Nikolai Svanidze called the notebooks a "moral and ethical depravity" and said information inside the cover about Stalin's repressions does not play a mitigating role.

Bilan addressed the negative reactions to the notebook, arguing that the officials' opinions don't reflect those of the country.

"The Public Chamber is not a legislative body of the Russian Federation, and it expresses the personal opinion of its representatives. And their opinion, I think, is in complete contrast with the majority of Russian citizens, who several years ago recognized Stalin as one of the outstanding figures of Russian history on the TV show "'Name of Russia,'" he said.

During Stalin's rule from the late 1920s until his death in 1953, millions are estimated to have perished from famine during agricultural collectivization and forced labor in Gulag camps in isolated regions with harsh conditions.

Results of a survey released in February by state-run pollster VTsIOM showed that only 28 percent considered the country to have been on the right course under Stalin, a drop from 37 percent in 2007. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev were pegged as the best and worst leaders in the survey, with 61 percent and 14 percent respectively agreeing that the country was on the right course under their leadership.

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