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Izhevsk Man Convicted for 'Xenophobic' Soviet-Era Joke on Social Media

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A district court in Izhevsk determined that the anecdote contained "incitement to racial hatred."

A Russian court has found signs of extremism in a "xenophobic" anecdote published online by a social network user, in a ruling that could see Russians receive jail time for sharing an inappropriate joke.

The anecdote, which cannot be reproduced by The Moscow Times for legal reasons, is a take on a Soviet-era narrative about a man who joins in the beating a Jewish passenger after seeing another man attack him on a bus.

In a post on his social media VKontakte website, the offender had changed the anecdote to feature a man from the Caucasus, the SOVA news agency reported Friday.

A district court in Izhevsk determined that the anecdote contained "incitement to racial hatred," the report said.

The decision was later upheld by the Supreme Court of the republic of Udmurtia after the man

appealed the initial ruling, the report added.

The court also agreed that there were signs of extremism in a photo published on VKontakte by the defendant, who was not named. The image showed four people holding hands to form the shape of a Nazi swastika symbol.

The SOVA report criticized the conviction as being inaccurate, arguing the anecdote does not explicitly call for violence and the charge for publishing the photo should have concerned the exhibiting of Nazi symbols — which is also an offense under Russian law.

Officials are known to sometimes file cases under different charges in order to reach set quotas.

The ruling is the first time since the fall of the Soviet Union that someone is convicted on extremism charges for telling an anecdote.

Extremism is an offense punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

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