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Gulag Museum to Reopen But Proof of Stalin Crimes Removed, Director Says

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Perm-36 — the only museum in Russia created on the site of a former gulag camp — is closing its doors following a long struggle with regional authorities.

A prison museum dedicated to victims of Soviet-era political repression may reopen as a memorial to the gulag system, but all references to crimes committed by dictator Josef Stalin will be removed, rights activists have said.

Perm-36 museum director Viktor Shmyrov said the "memorial won't disappear, but the museum has been taken over by other people appointed by the new authorities, who have totally changed the content," BBC Russian Service reported Wednesday.

"Now it's a museum about the camp system, but not about political prisoners. They don't talk about the repressions or about Stalin," he was quoted as saying.

Arseny Roginsky, president of Russia's leading human rights group Memorial — which founded the museum two decades ago — said the new management included former prison camp guards, AFP reported.

"The museum's format is being completely changed," Roginsky was quoted as saying. "It's tragic that a museum to Soviet terror will be transformed into a museum to the penal system."

The takeover of Perm-36, which is located in the Perm region, comes as an increasing number of Russians express favorable views of Stalin and amid the government's glorification of its Soviet past.

Perm-36 — the only museum in Russia created on the site of a former gulag camp — said Monday that after months of disputes with the authorities, attempts to preserve the museum have been "exhausted," and the memorial was "beginning the process of self-liquidation."

The museum had enjoyed government support for the first two decades after the Soviet collapse. But this changed "drastically" about three years ago, when the government cut its funding for the museum and disconnected water and electricity supplies, citing unpaid bills, the museum said in a statement.

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