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Stalin Monument in Siberia Removed Month After Unveiling

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A monument to Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin in the Siberian city of Surgut has been removed, Interfax news agency reported Thursday.

Surgut's administration told the news agency that the bust of the dictator had been erected illegally and that an administrative working commission had made the decision to remove it on Tuesday, adding that it was currently in storage.

The municipal administration was currently preparing claims to retrieve the money spent dismantling the monument, Interfax reported.

Speaking to The Moscow Times, spokesperson for the Russkiy Dukh (Russian Soul) group who put up the monument, Denis Khanzhin, described the incident as a theft and said the statue had been taken down by “unknown people.”

“The fight for the bust will continue," he said, adding that he had submitted a complaint to the police.

The bust of the infamous dictator on top of a pedestal was erected Sep. 15. Vandals defaced the monument with red paint twice within a week of its unveiling.

Surgut bore witness to the crimes of Stalin’s regime first hand, when it served as a stop on the Salekhard-Igarka Railway, a transport link constructed by Gulag prisoners under extremely harsh conditions.

Yekaterina Shvidka, the head of the Surgut administration’s communications policy department, told Interfax that many residents opposed the monument because “about half the town was repressed” under the Soviet regime.

Surgut authorities have just formally agreed to allow a monument to the victims of Soviet-era repressions to be placed on the town’s embankment, close to the spot where the bust of Stalin stood, Interfax reported.

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