

Duma Official Tolstoy Accuses Russian Jews of 'Attempting to Destroy Churches'

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United Russia politician Pyotr Tolstoy **Mikhail Pochuyev / TASS**

The deputy speaker of Russia's state parliament is under fire for anti-Semitic remarks accusing Russian Jews of attempting to destroy the country's Orthodox Church.

United Russia politician Pyotr Tolstoy, the great-great-grandson of celebrated Russian author Lev Tolstoy, told [the state-owned TASS news agency](#) that the "grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who pulled down our temples in 1917 were continuing their ancestors' work."

He described the revolutionaries as people "who jumped out of the Pale of Settlement" - a small area of western Imperial Russia where Ashkenazi Jews were permitted to settle - in a call to arms.

His words echo a popular anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that Jewish people masterminded the Communist revolution to destroy Russia.

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Tolstoy's reference to the Jewish community have since been removed from the TASS website, but a [live recording remains online](#).

The politician's words have since been condemned as "absolutely unacceptable" by Jewish leaders.

"I personally believe Tolstoy's statement to be open anti-Semitism," Borukh Gorin, spokesperson for the Federation of Jewish Organizations in Russia, told [the Ekhov Moskvy radio station](#).

"I would really like to know the how the country's leaders feel about such statements, which, in my opinion, completely undermine the foundations of modern Russia," he said.

The politician's comments came as he was questioned on protests against the transfer of St. Isaac's Cathedral to the custody of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The deputy speaker dismissed the protests, including a petition of more than 200,000 signatures, as "wasted effort."

"Unfortunately, in this Facebook society, people who really don't know anything believe that a whole country can be managed just by wildly sending SOS signals from one living room to another," he told TASS.

Tolstoy later defended his comments on his Facebook page, writing that he was "very surprised" by allegations of anti-semitism.

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"Only people with sick imaginations who do not know their own country's history could have seen any kind of 'anti-Semitism' in my comments," he wrote. "On the contrary, my words were a warning that we should not repeat the events 100 years ago, when thousands of temples were destroyed and hundreds of thousands of people were deported and executed."

"Someone is obviously trying to use these accusations in attempt to split discourse along nationalist lines."

St. Petersburg governor Georgy Poltavchenko announced that the state would gift St. Isaac's Cathedral to the church in a 49-year lease on Jan. 10.

The UNESCO world heritage site was seized by the Communist Party after the Russian revolution in 1917 and transformed into a "anti-religious museum" in the 1930s. While

many government officials have lauded the decision as returning the cathedral to its rightful owners, some activists say that the change of ownership will restrict public access to the iconic building.

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