

Prison Official Bristles at ‘Outdated’ Gulag Comparisons

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Sergey Vedyashkin / Moskva News Agency

A senior Russian prison official has said it is “wrong” to compare the penitentiary system to Soviet gulags because modern-day abuses are perpetrated by individual guards, not the system.

Russia’s prison system came under criticism last year following the publication of leaked bodycam footage showing guards torturing inmates. Last month, a chief warden in Siberia was [dismissed](#) on allegations of using slave labor five years after a member of the anti-Kremlin punk group Pussy Riot accused him of enslaving inmates.

“In my opinion, there’s no gulag legacy in our system today,” Federal Prison Service deputy chief Valery Maksimenko [told](#) Interfax in an interview. “These times have long gone.”

Related article: [Russia Admits Slave Labor Used at Pussy Riot Penal Colony](#)

“If one of our staffers beats up a prisoner, this isn’t a legacy of the gulag. It’s a lack of brains in a particular employee who either doesn’t want to work or lacks patience.”

Maksimenko, who [admitted](#) in December that Pussy Riot’s Nadezhda Tolokonnikova “was right” to accuse the dismissed warden in 2013, defended guards for having to interact with inmates for low pay.

“There’s such anguish in their eyes, such hopelessness,” he was [quoted](#) as saying, noting that many of the convicts are “angry at life and project their feelings and emotions on those around them.” ☒

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