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Russian Journalist Found Guilty Over 'Mind-Controlling' Orwell Reference

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Mikhail Romanov **yakutia.info / Youtube**

A journalist in Siberia has been found guilty over a reference he made to George Orwell's dystopian novel "1984," marking a milestone in Russia's legal system.

Mikhail Romanov was detained earlier this month over an article on the alleged torture of an academic that contained a reference to the famous phrase "Big Brother is watching."

A Yakutsk city court has fined Romanov 30,000 rubles ($475) for violating a Russian law criminalizing the distribution of "obviously unreliable socially significant information" that poses a threat to the public, Interfax reported on Thursday.

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A second protocol that had been drawn up against Romanov says the article violated another law that criminalizes "hidden insertions affecting the human subconscious," making his case

the first time a journalist has been tried under this law.

The authorities suspected that the article had tapped into readers' subconscious with the sentence: "This is a story about how anyone can be squashed by the government machine. It's also about how Big Brother is watching, reading all comments on online forums," Romanov's editor at the Yakutsk Vecherniy weekly told Kommersant after he was detained.

Fines for violating the "unreliable information" law range between 30,000 rubles and 100,000 rubles ($1,580).

Police told Kommersant that Romanov had repeatedly declined to provide testimony, citing his "limited eyesight and inability to read text."

"That circumstance hasn't kept him from working at a computer," the Yakutsk police department was reported as saying.

The Russian Union of Journalists had argued in a statement that "even someone without a literary education understands that this was only in reference to George Orwell's '1984.'"

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