

# A Bill to Remove Stalin And the Soviet Legacy

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Is the malign spirit of Josef Stalin still stalking his home country of Georgia?

That is what some Georgian members of parliament appear to believe. A bill that could ban Soviet symbols from public display and prevent certain former Communist officials from holding high office is currently making its way through the legislative process.

“Communism is a crime against humanity, just like fascism,” explained one deputy from the governing party. “For us, it is not just an ideology. It involved the occupation of Georgia.”

The best-known statue of Stalin in Georgia, in his hometown of Gori, was finally pulled down in June. Appropriately, it disappeared without warning during the night, like so many victims of the Soviet dictator’s purges. The famous quip “no man — no problem” is most often attributed to Stalin, but although the man is no longer on his plinth, the authorities seem to believe that the problem hasn’t been fully resolved yet.

Georgians who express nostalgia for the economic certainties of Communist rule tend to be elderly and impoverished. The young and affluent have little desire to turn back the clock. But a few of those who despise the Soviet regime have expressed concerns that Georgia could lose some of its collective historical memory.

“Whether we like it or not, the Soviet Union is our past, and we will never be able to erase this past,” said one respondent to an opinion survey in a Tbilisi newspaper recently.

Since the government of President Mikheil Saakashvili came to power, it has been trying to wrench the country away from its Soviet legacy. The new bill, known as the Liberty Charter, would take that process further. Some of the offending statues may possibly be rehoused in museums alongside displays explaining the brutal reality of Communist repression. The anniversary of the Red Army’s invasion of Georgia in 1921 has already been designated Soviet Occupation Day.

But as veteran Georgian political analyst Alexander Rondeli once remarked to me, expunging the psychological legacy of communism could take a lot more time and effort.

“Lenin and Stalin are still within us — not with us, but within us,” Rondeli said. “This Soviet culture is still inside our heads, and until we finally get rid of it we cannot be genuinely free.”

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