

Culture Minister Asks NTV to Stop Airing of Controversial Film

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A preview for the film "I Serve the Soviet Union"

Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky sent a letter to the head of NTV asking him not to show a controversial film showing gulag prisoners shot by Soviet troops on the June 22 anniversary of Germany's 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union.

The film, "I Serve the Soviet Union," is based on Leonid Menaker's novel "Lunch With the Devil" and has sparked controversy for depicting events unfolding in a gulag prison camp during the Nazi invasion.

In the film, after the camp's guards flee advancing Nazi forces, the prisoners themselves enter into battle, only to be shot by Soviet NKVD troops after defeating the Germans.

"I think it's out of place to show the more-than-controversial film 'I Serve the Soviet Union' on June 22, the Day of Remembrance and Mourning," Medinsky wrote in the letter to NTV head Vladimir Kulistikov, RIA-Novosti reported. "It can be seen by many as an insult to veterans and our historical memory."

He wrote that the culture ministry did not want to meddle in the affairs of television stations, but that it was necessary to "responsibly approach topics on which a controversial interpretation could cause a split in society."

Medinsky said the ministry had received about 2,000 letters over two days, including from State Duma Deputy Vladimir Simagin, asking that the film not be shown on television.

Medinsky, who received a PhD in history earlier this year amid accusations of plagiarism, is perhaps best known for writing a series of pro-Kremlin books called "Myths about Russia," a role that has prompted criticism that his title be changed to propaganda minister.

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