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Rabbi Lazar condemns Soviet past, calls to bury body of Lenin



Moscow, January 6, Interfax - Before the start of the year marking the 100th anniversary of the revolution Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar said that Lenin and Stalin have soaked the country in blood and he stood for the reburial of the body of Lenin and refurbishing the mausoleum into a museum.

"The body of Lenin should be interred, and the tombs at the cemetery near the Kremlin Wall should be relocated to other cemeteries. Representatives of all denominations share an opinion that this is needed to be done. As to the Lenin's mausoleum, I believe that it is unnecessary to destroy it, as the building organically fitted in with the Red Square ensemble. It would be

better to set up a museum dedicated to the Soviet era at the mausoleum," Lazar said in an interview with Interfax-Religion.

Having given the assessment to Lenin and Stalin, he noted that both of them "are people who overflowed the country with blood and sought to replace the faith in the God with a cult of idolized leaders."

Lazar admitted that for him the Soviet period of history is the dark times, because the Bolsheviks have been seeking for their goal "through violence that reached its apogee under Stalin."

"Severe restrictions have been in effect against the believers [regardless of their religious identity] practically throughout the entire Soviet period. Until Stalin's death they were subjected to large-scale repressions - people were imprisoned or executed simply for the fulfillment of the duties of a clergyman. Then the repressions against the believers became individual, but different harassments and restrictions remained in place that I have still witnessed in the late 1980s. All good what people are speaking about, recalling the Soviet Union, existed not thanks to, but rather in defiance of the regime," he said.

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Lenin should be buried, but the most important is not to inflict harm, the Russian church official believes.

Moscow, January 6, Interfax - Head of the Patriarchal Council for Culture, rector of the Moscow Sretensky Monastery Bishop Tikhon (Shevkunov) of Yegoryevsk believes that Lenin's body should be interred, but authorities should take the final decision.

"Red Square is not a cemetery, it is not a place for such burials, but it will be decided by people who are authorized to take such decisions, after listening to all opinions. And this decision will

certainly influence many vectors. The most important thing is not to inflict harm," the bishop told in his interview with Interfax-Religion.

He has no doubts that Lenin's mummified remains will be relocated, but "as to the question when it happens, such decision should be taken by those who are responsible for possible consequences that speed of taking this decision does not deserve."

"We will say that it should be done, but we won't cry out that we have to do it right now or tomorrow. We inform people about our opinion, many people share it. And then let it be decided by those people who are responsible for civil peace in the country," the bishop said.

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RIP at last? Over half of Russians want Lenin's body to be buried – poll

At least 58 percent of Russians think Lenin's body should be taken from the Red Square Mausoleum and properly buried, though the majority don't want the monument to the Bolshevik leader to be removed from Moscow's main square, a new poll indicates.

The poll was conducted by the Levada Center, a Russian non-governmental polling and sociological research group, Interfax reported. It was released on the eve of the Bolshevik leader's birthday (April 22).

Around 1,600 people from 137 Russian cities and towns took part in the poll between March 31 and April 3.

According to the survey, 32 percent of those who agreed the body of the communist revolutionary leader should be moved from Red Square want to bury him near the Kremlin walls. Another 26 percent want to bury Lenin in Volkovo Cemetery in St. Petersburg, where many artists, musicians, and politicians were laid to rest. Lenin's mother and sister are also buried there. The majority of respondents, 78 percent, said they were against removing Lenin's monument from Red Square. According to the poll, the proportion of Russians positively disposed towards Lenin's policies jumped from 40 percent in 2006 to 56 percent.

The pollsters also asked the respondents to evaluate the role of the Bolshevik leader in the history of Russia, and 26 percent said that Lenin will live on in people's memory but no one will follow in his path. Another 23 percent said that Lenin led the country to progress and equality, while 21 percent answered that his ideas were distorted by his followers.

One-fifth believe that the Bolshevik leader "was trying to rely on the best thoughts and hopes of people to lead them to a brighter future," while 15 percent say that Lenin led the country in the wrong direction, causing many misfortunes and problems, and 11 percent believe he was wrong in his expectations for revolution and communism.

The issue of Lenin's burial is a topic of heated debate. It has been discussed from the early days of Perestroika back in the late 1980s, but so far, the only change has been the removal of the honorary guard from the Mausoleum. The debate usually intensifies before his birthday and the anniversary of the October Revolution.

In March this year, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) called for Vladimir Lenin's body to be removed from Red Square as a demonstration of the Russian people's reconciliation with God.

"The liberation of Red Square from the remains of the main tormentor and repressor of the 20th century, as well as the destruction of all monuments dedicated to him, could become one of the symbols of the Russian people's reconciliation with the Lord," reads the statement passed by ROCOR's Arch-Hierarchy Synod in connection with the upcoming anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

In response, a senior spokesman of the Russian Orthodox Church dismissed the idea of removing Lenin's body from the mausoleum on Red Square, saying that before this happens, the country must rid itself of its Soviet and communist legacy.

"We understand very well that his presence on Red Square has nothing in common with Christian traditions. But we cannot raise the question of his reburial before we complete the campaign on de-Sovietization and decommunization in the post-Soviet space," Russian Orthodox Church official Alexander Shipkov was quoted as saying by Interfax.

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Revolutionary corpse: Why and how Russia still preserves Lenin in its heart

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As Russia marks the centennial of the Bolshevik revolution on Tuesday, the long-standing row over the body of its leader in the heart of Moscow has reignited. RT looks back on how Vladimir Lenin ended up as Red Square's most controversial feature.

The debate over what should be done with the Bolshevik leader's body never really goes away. However, there is usually a peak in April around Lenin's birthday and another in the run-up for anniversary of 1917's October Revolution, counter-intuitively marked on November 7th thanks to the change to the Gregorian calendar shortly thereafter.

2017 was no exception. This year, joining the usual chorus of voices calling for Lenin's removal and burial was Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who said "we should stop staring at a corpse". **The call brought a predictable rebuke from the Russian Communist Party leader, Gennady Zyuganov, who claimed that President Vladimir Putin promised him that no such move would happen as long as he holds the office.** His supporters rallied on Tuesday carrying banners that said: *"Hands off the mausoleum!"*

Proponents of burying Lenin usually argue that this would be in line with Orthodox Christian tradition and well as wishes of the man's family. There is also the cost of maintaining the remains and the mausoleum building, which is covered in part by the national budget, and partially by donations through a non-profit fund. Some say placing Lenin under the ground is necessary to bury the Communist past of the nation. Others go so far as to call for its public disgrace as a symbolic punishment for the crimes committed by the Bolsheviks.

Defenders of the status quo cite Lenin's role in creating a state based on a dream of unprecedented equality – a dream that, arguably, forced capitalist nations throughout the world to pass labor reforms and become less socially unfair. They also see nothing wrong with keeping the remains unburied, citing similar examples like that of Russian surgeon Nikolay Pirogov, whose embalmed body has been on display since the 1880s in the city of Vinnitsa in what is now Ukraine. Pirogov's body is kept in a crypt under an Orthodox church, treated not unlike a saint's relic by some churchgoers.

The Russian government over the years has tried to keep distance from the debate, saying that burying Lenin had little practical value and would likely hurt the feelings of many elderly people. It also appears to be trying to maintain its distance from the body itself. In recent years the mausoleum has been hidden from the public eye during the military parade for Victory Day – among the most important public events in Russia – in contrast with the way Communist leaders observed the march from atop the memorial building.

For the Russian public the issue seems to be gradually losing importance. Opinion is divided into roughly equal parts, between those who want Lenin's body to stay indefinitely, those demanding relocation and those who suggest the burial should take place at some point in the future. The latter opinion has been gaining popularity over the years.

'Living sculpture'

Vladimir Lenin died in January 1924 after two years of struggling with severe health problems and increasingly strict isolation imposed by fellow party members. Initially there was no intention among the Bolsheviks to keep his body preserved for more than the few days needed to lay in wake, but Lenin's temporary mausoleum attracted flocks of people wishing to say goodbye and the stream showed no sign of abating.

As the saying goes, nothing is as permanent as a temporary solution. Several days were stretched into two months through an initial embalming procedure and thanks to unusually cold temperatures during winter. By the March thaw, the Communist leaders were discussing ways to keep the body in shape even longer, with different figures advocating their favorite methods. The suggested solutions included freezing the body solid, or storing it in a container full of formaldehyde or in a sealed capsule pumped full of nitrogen.

Even then, there was no goal of preserving the body indefinitely, as evidenced by the proposal of military commander Kliment Voroshilov, who said: "I propose doing nothing. If the body holds up for another year without change, this is already good enough."

Crazy as it sounds, there were two coexisting government commissions at the time: one tasked with organizing the burial of Lenin and one with keeping his body intact and on display, and many people were members of both.

Eventually an experimental embalment procedure was authorized and performed by Vladimir Vorobiev, a professor of medicine, and Boris Zbarsky, a biochemist. The procedure started a decade-long experiment which blended science, art and, arguably, mysticism in a constant process of "reembalming, rescupturing and substituting" the remains of Lenin with specially developed artificial materials, writes professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, Alexei Yurchak.

The care given to the remains of Lenin went far beyond simply preventing decomposition. A special research institute with dozens of specialists and lucrative funding was working hard on new ways of making the body look and feel as if it was freshly dead. They devised special fluids to keep the skin elastic and colored the right way; pumped small amounts of a paraffin-based substance under the skin to compensate for the inevitable loss of body fat to degradation; found ways to keep even the smaller joints flexible. One veteran scientist described the subject of his endeavors as a "living sculpture" to explain the work.

Interestingly, the majority of Soviet people could not appreciate the effort. While hundreds of thousands visited the mausoleum, all they could see was an immobile shape in a sealed container with only hands and face uncovered. The state of the rest of the body was witnessed only by the caretakers and inspectors, who described their findings in regular classified reports to the party leadership.

While usually the reports commended the scientists for making their charge better and better over the years, sometimes things went gravely wrong. In March 1945, for instance, after a skin-enhancing procedure a piece of epidermis from Lenin's right foot went missing. Despite all efforts, it was never found and later replaced with a graft.

Source of sovereignty

There are plenty of historic precedents for people's remains being preserved and put on display. In addition to the aforementioned Pirogov, there is the famous example of English philosopher Jeremy Bentham, whose figure can be seen at University College London – with the original head replaced with a wax cast, and displayed next to the body. Another example is Eva Peron, whose preserved body is a pilgrimage destination for devoted Argentinians – and fans of the musical. But the persistent embalment of Lenin is a unique Communist tradition.

The extraordinary amount of resources poured into Lenin's preservation may seem irrational, considering how little practical value the project had besides an occasional chance to show off the body's flexible neck to foreign dignitaries. A waxwork statue would arguably serve as just as good a centerpiece for propaganda. Some argue that the entire program was conceived as a quasi-religious cult, **with Lenin's remains playing the role of a "Communist saint" relic** to win the hearts of a deeply religious nation. Contemporary records disprove the theory, showing that Communist officials were concerned that such a comparison may arise, and took steps to avoid it.

In the Soviet Union the corps of works by Lenin was used as a source of legitimacy by the Communist party. Any serious policy had to be justified by a suitable quote, and finding the right one for the occasion was a necessary skill for any senior bureaucrat. Every head of the USSR from Stalin to Gorbachev had to observe this ritual, and Stalin's attempt to add his name to that of Lenin's failed spectacularly. The embalment of the corpse was a continuation of the personality cult that, according to a popular saying, made Lenin "more alive than all the living".

This newfound tradition went beyond the Soviet Union. People like "Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Min were legitimized... through their references to Lenin," Yurchak told RT. "And all other communist and quasi-communist bodies that were preserved by the Mausoleum lab in Moscow, were preserved as references to Lenin's body. Had his body not been preserved in the first place, the other ones would not be preserved either."

Apart from Lenin, nine bodies underwent the same treatment, eight of them with help from Moscow. The body of Mao was embalmed in a similar manner, but independently from the Soviet scientists – to stress Beijing's opposition to post-Stalin's USSR, and their claim that China was the true heir to Lenin's teachings, the anthropologist added.

The argument is supported by a famous hoax by avant-garde artist Sergey Kuryokhin. In early 1991, he gave an extensive interview for a television program, in which he stated that Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders were fond of mind-affecting mushrooms. Lenin consequently was transformed from a human into a human-shaped mushroom with the properties of a radio wave. The absurd claim was backed by pseudo-scientific babble and lots of visuals.

The program was intended as a satire on sensationalist TV reports and Communist ideology desperately trying to reform itself through the perestroika, but it also flipped the mythical iconography of Lenin upside down, still depicting him as more than an ordinary man, but in an utterly ridiculous way.

Slow path to insignificance

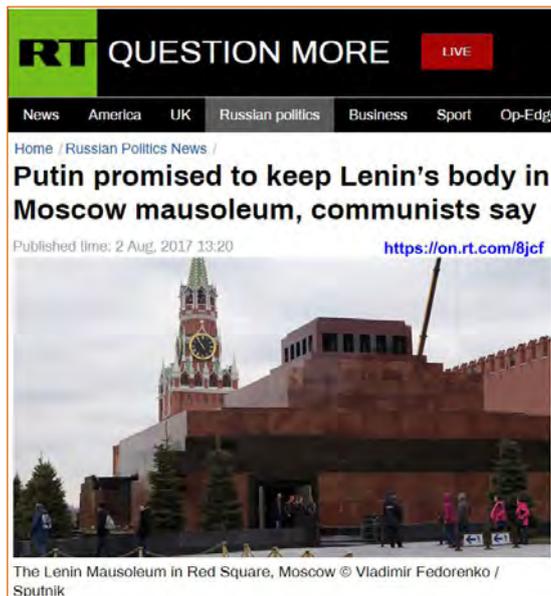
The turbulent 1990s transformation of Russia left little place for Lenin's icon, despite its symbolism. The lab that performed renewal procedures was defunded, initially forcing dedicated employees to work for free. In 1993 a special fund was founded to collect donations and use them to continue the project.

The Lenin Mausoleum fund was the sole source of resources for a 12-strong lab working on Lenin's remains, its longtime director Aleksey Abramov told RT. Only in 2013 was some public money allocated for the mausoleum. According to a budget acquisition disclosure, last year Russia's Federal Protection Service – the organization tasked with the personal security of senior government officials and places, including the Kremlin – spent about \$222,000 on the preservation effort. "Our government was receptive to the needs of the mausoleum lab," he said. The ultimate fate of the extraordinary exhibit remains undecided, but it appears that the current situation will be preserved along with Lenin's body until a time when it becomes largely insignificant for the living.

By Alexandre Antonov, RT
@alantonov

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Putin promised to keep Lenin's body in Moscow mausoleum, communists say.

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The head of the Russian Communist Party has said that Vladimir Putin promised him that as long as he remains president, Vladimir Lenin's body will stay in the mausoleum in Red Square.

Gennadiy Zyuganov made the comments at the Terra Scientia international youth education forum.

"As long as I sit here, there will be no barbarism in Red Square," the Communist chief quoted Putin as saying at a conference with Russian party leaders some time ago.

According to Zyuganov, Putin also dismissed allegations that Lenin was not buried in accordance with Christian traditions.

"As far as the form of the burial is concerned, they use the one that

is also used in Orthodox Christianity – he lies a meter and a half below the ground level. Sepultures and cave burials are known for a long time," Putin said, according to Zyuganov.

Bolshevik leader Lenin was buried in the mausoleum in Red Square soon after his death in 1924, although the present stone tomb was erected only in 1930.

The mausoleum and the cult of Lenin played an important part in Soviet ideology, and the public debate about the possibility of Lenin's reburial began during the early days of perestroika in the 1980s. It usually intensifies every year before Lenin's birthday and the anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution.

So far, the only change has been the removal of the honorary guard from the mausoleum.

However, in one of the latest polls on the subject conducted in April this year, at least 58 percent of Russians told researchers that Lenin's body should be taken from Red Square and properly buried, while the mausoleum itself must remain in its current place.

Also, in March this year, a senior spokesman of the Russian Orthodox Church, Aleksandr Shipkov, dismissed the idea of removing Lenin's body from Red Square, saying that before this happens Russia and neighboring countries must rid themselves of the Soviet and communist legacy. He also called for a temporary moratorium on any war against political symbols in Russia.

<https://www.rt.com/politics/398319-putin-promised-to-keep-lenin/>