



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 26, 2012

Pa. High School Band Commemorates Russian Revolution; Citizens Outraged

Pennsylvania's New Oxford High School marching band stirred [controversy](#) earlier this week after a halftime show that commemorated the Russian revolution included olive military-style uniforms and giant hammers and sickles. There was an immediate public outcry against the performance prompting the superintendent to issue an [apology](#) for the display. Additionally, the band has reportedly made significant changes to the halftime show.



The theme for the New Oxford High School marching band was "St. Petersburg: 1917." The band's performance featured red flags, military uniforms, and giant hammers and sickles, even as the school's athletic teams are called the Colonials and feature red, white, and blue uniforms. The website for the band included a large group photo with students donning a hammer and sickle.

An angry parent notified Fox News to alert them to the school's antics. The parent, who asked not to be identified, attended a football game at the school with his children on September 14 and was appalled by the performance he witnessed. He told Fox News,

It was Glee meets the Russian Revolution. I'm not kidding you. They had giant hammers and sickles and they were waving them around. Who thought this was a good idea?

There is no reason for Americans to celebrate the Russian revolution. I am sure the millions who died under Communism would not see the joy of celebrating the Russian revolution by a school 10 miles from Gettysburg.

It would be tantamount to celebrating the music of 1935 Berlin. If I was Lithuanian, Estonian, or Ukrainian, I'd be a little hot. I'd be really hot. It's insulting to glorify something that doesn't need to be glorified in America.

The Blaze [reports](#) that another parent "equated it to unexpectedly seeing your children waving swastikas during a halftime performance, noting that communism has killed more people than Nazis."

But Conewago Valley School District Superintendent Rebecca Harbaugh argued that the halftime show is "not an endorsement of communism at all."

"It's a representation of the time period in history called St. Petersburg 1917," she said. "I am truly sorry that somebody took the performance in that manner. I am."

"If anything is being celebrated it's the music," she said. "It is what it is. I understand people look at something and choose how to interpret that and I'm just very sorry that it wasn't looked at as just a history lesson."

Attempting to shake the school's unpatriotic image, she added that the school did "an entire show on freedom" in 2008.



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Despite the superintendent's assertions, parents are still infuriated by the halftime performance. In fact, the influx of complaints has compelled Harbaugh to admit that "many people have expressed concerns about the show."

She argued that the purpose of the show was to underscore "a dark time in our world's history and that's the way it was portrayed on the field."

"It's not an uplifting performance," Harbaugh said.

But for some connected to the school, such a theme was too harsh for a high school band to portray at a halftime show.

One student posted on his Facebook page,

I think the question is whether it is appropriate for a high school band to commemorate an event that led to unimaginable brutality of millions of Russian citizens. Stalin was just not a very nice guy. The tie to socialism is also a sore subject in this day and age.

Harbaugh [attempted](#) to quell the situation by indicating that the school recognizes some fault in the matter and has made the necessary changes:

We are taking steps to address many of the concerns expressed to us. This is a learning opportunity for not only our students who have learned about the Revolution and its tragic consequences but it also a learning opportunity for us as teachers and administrators.

The performance will now be called "The Music of Shostakovich," with the hammer and sickle replaced by the traditional color guard band equipment.

Some are still in disbelief over the performance.

Paul Kengor, executive director for the Vision & Values center at Pennsylvania's Grove City College, said he believed that the halftime show was a joke initially. "This is surreal," he told Fox News. "This is like something out of the Twilight Zone — but it's even stranger than that."

Kengor said even if the school was not celebrating the revolution, "they seem to be commemorating this to some degree."

"The Bolshevik Revolution launched a global Communist revolution that from 1917 through the 1990s was responsible for the deaths of over a hundred million people," he said. "What the Russian revolution unleashed was a nightmare — a historical human catastrophe. This is something that should be condemned and not in any way commemorated or laughed at."

Gerson Moreno-Riano, dean of Regent University's College of Arts & Sciences, found the performance shocking:

The Russian revolution was one of the most violent episodes of the 20th century. Lenin put into place a doctrine of mass terror to crush the opposition and thousands and thousands of people. It's full of violence, terror, destruction, and in some weeks thousands of people were executed — some thrown with rocks around their necks into the river to drown.

It's quite frankly horrific that a high school would be celebrating that at a football game.

Even worse for Moreno-Riano was the photograph of the band on the school website that showed the students holding a hammer and sickle.

"To raise the emblems of the hammer and sickle — the emblems of so much violence, destruction and



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terror — is a lack of knowledge of history,” he maintained.

Moreno-Riano contends that the best case scenario is that those who orchestrated the performance were simply ignorant of the historical reference.

“The worst case scenario is someone who is trying to celebrate something they know about — and they’re trying to insert this into their educational agenda,” he said.

Despite the controversial choice of entertainment, however, the *Evening Sun* reported that the judges of the Cavalcade of Bands Association Inc. show at Manheim Township High School awarded the New Oxford High School marching band first place on September 22.

Photo: New Oxford High School marching band



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