

Justice Has Prevailed. Khodorkovsky's trip to the slammer: "Booyah, Putin"

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Vladimir Putin summed it up best when he said, "A thief should sit in jail." Right on. It doesn't matter if he is the richest man in the country or not. If he's done the crime, he's got to do the time. It's that simple.

On Wednesday, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former head of Yukos Oil was sentenced to 14 years in prison for embezzling and money laundering. Heads of state, human rights organisations, business leaders, and the entire western media have all protested on Khodorkovsky's behalf, but to no avail. Khodorkovsky will stay in prison where he belongs. Justice has prevailed.

Khodorkovsky's problems began when he challenged an informal agreement with the Kremlin not to intervene in Russian politics. But the oil oligarch thought Putin was weak, so he strengthened his contacts in Washington and dumped money into parliamentary elections. He unwisely assumed that he could defy Putin and extend his tentacles into politics following the model of corporate control he saw in the United States, where the courts, the congress, the White House and the media are all in the pocket of big business. Only he misjudged Putin and ended up in the hoosegow.

According to the Wall Street Journal:

"Mr. Khodorkovsky was arrested on a rented jet in Siberia Oct. 23, 2003, flown to Moscow and jailed on charges of fraud and tax evasion. Just over a year later, Yukos's main subsidiary had been sold at auction to a little-known Russian company that later sold it to the state oil company, OAO Rosneft.

Investors, who watched the market value of Yukos plunge from \$40 billion to next to nothing in a matter of months, proved to have short memories. By the summer of 2006, they were lining up to buy stock in Rosneft's initial public offering. The company's main asset had belonged to Yukos."

And, according to Wikipedia:

"Khodorkovsky was charged with acting illegally in the privatisation process of the former state-owned mining and fertiliser company Apatit.....In addition, prosecutors conducted an extensive investigation into Yukos for offences that went beyond the financial and tax-related charges. Reportedly there were three cases of murder and one of attempted murder linked to Yukos, if not Khodorkovsky himself....."

When a deep-pocket Robber Barron is charged with a crime, everyone comes to their aid, including “the Italian Parliament, the German Bundestag, and the U.S. House of Representatives”. But Khodorkovsky is guilty. The Russian court got it right. The rest is just propaganda.

The portrayal of Khodorkovsky as an “innocent victim of a justice system run amok” borders on the ridiculous. Take a look at this comical article in the Economist ominously titled “The Trial, Part Two”. Here’s an excerpt:

“The transformation of Mr Khodorkovsky from a ruthless oligarch, operating in a virtually lawless climate, into a political prisoner and freedom fighter is one of the more intriguing tales in post-communist Russia....In this narrow sense, indeed, the imprisoned Mr Khodorkovsky might be compared to the exiled Andrei Sakharov in the 1980s. Both Mr Khodorkovsky and Sakharov, an eminent nuclear physicist, chose a thorny path. And both of these one-time political prisoners then, in effect, took their persecutors and jailers hostage. Just as Mikhail Gorbachev’s talk of perestroika, opening up and new thinking, rang hollow until the moment when he allowed Sakharov to come home, so any talk by the Kremlin of the rule of law or about modernisation will be puffery so long as Mr Khodorkovsky remains in jail.” (The Economist)

So now the cutthroat scamster Khodorkovsky is Andrei Sakharov? One might think that the Economist would worry that such claptrap would damage its credibility, but apparently not. Apparently, nothing matters quite as much as springing their felonious friends from prison.

The Obama administration has also interceded on Khodorkovsky’s behalf even before the verdict was delivered. White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said that the US was troubled by “what appears to be an abusive use of the legal system for improper ends”.

“The apparent selective application of the law to these individuals undermines Russia’s reputation as a country committed to deepening the rule of law.”

Gibbs failed to note how many crooked CEOs or CFOs of major Wall Street firms have been investigated, indicted, prosecuted, arrested, tried, or convicted?

So far, that number is zero. So much for the Obama administration’s commitment to the rule of law.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also put in her two-cents saying that a conviction would have a “negative impact on Russia’s reputation.”

Right. This is the same Hillary Clinton who has thrown her support behind the Patriot Act, the intrusive/illegal TSA “pat downs”, the limitless detention of terror suspects, increased surveillance of US citizens, and the de facto repeal of habeas corpus.

Clinton’s credibility on civil liberties is zilch.

Imagine what it would be like to live in a country where the rich had to play by the same rules as everyone else? Presumably, one would have to move to Russia. There is no expectation of justice in the US today. None.

Khodorkovsky was convicted because he's a crook and because the Russian justice system is less corrupt than the one in the US. His incarceration is a victory for the people who want to see the law applied fairly regardless of how rich someone is.

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