

Destroying the Magnitsky Myth

A new documentary blows apart the West's Russia-bashing narrative about the 2009 death of Sergei Magnitsky, so the response has been to stop the public from seeing the film while calling it Russian "agit-prop," as Gilbert Doctorow explains.

By Gilbert Doctorow

Despite all the threats of lawsuits and physical intimidation which hedge fund executive William Browder brought to bear over the past couple of months to ensure that a remarkable investigative film about the so-called Magnitsky case would not be screened anywhere, it was shown privately in a museum of journalism in Washington, D.C., last week.

The failure of the intimidation may give heart to others. There is talk that the film may be shown publicly in Norway, where its production company is located, but where an attempt several weeks ago to enter it into a local festival for documentaries was rejected by the hosts for fear of lawsuits. Moreover, a Norwegian court has in the past week declined to hear the libel charges which Browder's attorneys were seeking to bring against the film's director and producers.

Browder was more successful [in intimidating the European Parliament](#) where a screening of the film was cancelled in late April while I was in the audience. But I have now seen the banned documentary privately and "The Magnitsky Act. Behind the Scenes" is truly an amazing film that takes the viewer through the thought processes of well-known independent film maker Andrei Nekrasov as he sorts through the evidence.

At the outset of his project, Nekrasov planned to produce a docu-drama that would be one more public confirmation of the narrative that Browder has sold to the U.S. Congress and to the American and European political elites, that a 36-year-old whistleblower "attorney" (actually an accountant) named Sergei Magnitsky was arrested, tortured and murdered by Russian authorities for exposing a \$230 million tax fraud scheme.

This shocking tale of alleged Russian official corruption and brutality drove legislation that was a major landmark in the descent of U.S.-Russian relations under President Barack Obama to a level rivaling the worst days of the Cold War.

But what the film shows is how Nekrasov, as he detected loose ends to the official story, begins to unravel Browder's fabrication which was designed to conceal his own corporate responsibility for the criminal theft of the money. As

Browder's widely accepted story collapses, Magnitsky is revealed not to be a whistleblower but a likely abettor to the fraud who died in prison not from an official assassination but from banal neglect of his medical condition.

The cinematic qualities of the film are evident. Nekrasov is highly experienced as a maker of documentaries enjoying a Europe-wide reputation. What sets this work apart from the "trade" is the honesty and the integrity of the filmmaker as he discovers midway into his project that key assumptions of his script are faulty and begins an independent investigation to get at the truth.

An Inconvenient Truth

It is an inconvenient truth that he stumbles upon, because it takes him out of his familiar milieu of "creative people" who are instinctively critical of the Putin regime and of its widely assumed violation of human rights and civil liberties.

We see how well-known names in the European Parliament, in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and in NGOs that are reputed to be watchdogs have taken on faith the arguments and documentation (largely in Russian and inaccessible to them) which they received from William Browder and then rubber-stamped his story as validated without making any attempt to weigh the evidence.

Their intellectual laziness and complacency is captured fully on film and requires no commentary by the director. One of those especially skewered by her own words is German Bundestag deputy (Greens) Marieluise Beck. It is understandable to me now that I have viewed the film why she was one of the two individuals whose objections to its showing scuttled the screening in the European Parliament in April.

By the end of the documentary, Nekrasov finds that he has become a dissident in his own subculture within Russia and in European liberal circles.

Another exceptional and striking characteristic of the filmmaker is his energetic pursuit of all imaginable leads in his investigative reporting. Some leads end in "no comment" while others result in exposing whole new areas of lies and deception in the Browder narrative.

Nekrasov's diligence is exemplary even as he takes us into the more arcane aspects of the case such as the money flow from the alleged tax fraud. These bits and pieces are essential to his methodology and justify the length of the movie, which approaches two hours.

Nekrasov largely allows William Browder to self-destruct under the weight of his own lies and the contradictions in his story-telling at various times.

Nekrasov's camera is always running, even if his subjects are not thinking about the consequences of being taped. The film also shows a videotaped deposition of Browder fumbling during an interrogation in a related civil case that is devastating to those politicians and commentators who fully swallowed Browder's Magnitsky line.

Browder's supposed lapses of memory, set in the context of involuntary facial expressions of stress and nervousness, would be compelling to jurors if this matter ever got into an open court of law in an adversarial proceeding.

At the end of the twists and turns in this expose, the viewer is ready to see Browder sink through the floor on a direct transfer to hell like Don Giovanni in the closing scene of Mozart's opera. Nothing so colorful occurs, but it is hard to see how Browder can survive the onslaught of this film if and when it gets wide public viewing.

But the goal of many powerful people, including members of the U.S. Congress, the European Parliament and the Western news media who gullibly accepted Browder's tale, will be to ensure that the public never gets to see this devastatingly frank deconstruction of a geopolitically useful anti-Russian propaganda theme.

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