

The strange death of Boris Berezovsky

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Russian oligarch, Boris Berezovsky, was found dead on the bathroom floor of his Berkshire mansion in Britain on Saturday. The post-mortem examination conducted by the Thames Valley police concluded that his death was “consistent with hanging,” stating further that there was “no evidence that a third party was involved.”

According to official reports, there were indications of strangulation on Berezovsky’s neck, and a scarf was found near his body. The door to the bathroom in which he was found was locked on the inside and no suicide note has been found. So far no reference has been made in any press report to any rope having been found. His body was not dangling from the ceiling, but lying on the floor. The claim that his death was “consistent with hanging” is ambiguous, to say the least.

A multi-billionaire with a vast empire of media, oil and financial holdings, Boris Berezovsky was the personification of the criminal class of plutocrats whose wealth was acquired through the systematic looting of the Russian economy during and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A Stalinist bureaucrat in the Soviet Federation of Young Communists, the Komsomol, Berezovsky made his fortune through the privatization and sale of state assets.

He gained control of ORT television, the only station then capable of broadcasting to all 89 regions of Russia. Berezovsky was the most prominent backer of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, deploying his wealth and control of the media to establish and expand his rule. Known at the time at the ‘Godfather of the Kremlin,’ Berezovsky administered the financial fortune of the Yeltsin family, and engaged in the shady backroom politics of intrigue and manipulation.

At the head of the thin social stratum of the nouveaux riche, Berezovsky was engaged in the purchase and pillaging of state assets. The rape of the Russian economy involved the violent liquidation of rivals.

Berezovsky was the repeated target of assassination attempts, car bombings, poisonings and shootings. Several of Berezovsky’s business rivals, as well as journalists who criticized him, wound up dead in violent and suspicious circumstances.

Berezovsky was integral to the rise to power and election of Vladimir Putin as president in 2000. Within weeks, however, of Putin’s election, a falling-out occurred. Berezovsky used his control of ORT to sharply criticize Putin. Putin responded by having fraud charges brought against Berezovsky and carried out the state takeover of ORT.

Berezovsky sought exile in London, formally gaining political asylum in 2003. Along with other oligarchic emigres to London, Berezovsky brought with him a culture of extraordinary excess—of mansions, yachts and astronomical hotel bills. Berezovsky began conspiring against Putin and against his fellow refugees. Over the space of a decade, these plutocrats engaged in brutal infighting over the control of their criminally acquired assets.

In 2012, Berezovsky lost a civil case for £3 billion, the largest civil court case in British legal history, to his former business partner Roman Abramovich, over the control of the Russian oil company Sibneft. The other claimant to Sibneft, Berezovsky’s long-time business partner, Badri Patarkatsishvili, died in England in 2008, under suspicious circumstances.

Berezovsky was a man with many enemies and few friends. The question of who had a motive to kill Berezovsky is best answered by asking, who didn’t?

In the aftermath of the announcement of Berezovsky’s death, the press immediately began to tell a story of a man driven to depression and suicide by the loss of wealth and power. The story is largely founded upon two pieces of evidence, both dubious.

A prepared press statement from Putin’s administration was immediately released, claiming that

Berezovsky had sent a hand-written note to Putin apologizing and seeking to be re-admitted to Russia. And a Russian journalist claimed that she had conducted an interview with Berezovsky the day before his suicide in which he stated that he had lost interest in life.

Given the person of Boris Berezovsky and the circumstances of this death, these statements reek of well-timed leaks and serve to deepen suspicions of foul play, rather than to allay them.

The statements are contradicted by Berezovsky's close friend, Yuri Felshtinsky, who told the *Financial Times*, "Suicide was not in his DNA."

Whatever the circumstances of his death, whether self-inflicted or the result of murder, Berezovsky embodied the criminal methods employed in the restoration of capitalism in the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR.



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