

NTV Yukos Film Fuels Campaign Against Khodorkovsky

June 25, 2013



Mikhail Khodorkovsky

The state controlled NTV channel has aired a documentary alleging that the Yukos founders, including Mikhail Khodorkovsky, were involved in the killing of the mayor of Nefteyugansk in western Siberia in 1998.

The film is seen by experts as part of a campaign to set the scene for a third criminal case against Yukos head Mikhail Khodorkovsky and his business partner Platon Lebedev.

The documentary, called "Murder for a Present," was shown on NTV at 11:35 p.m. Monday and focused on the murder of Vladimir Petukhov, who was gunned down in the city on Khodorkovsky's birthday in 1998. The documentary's release also coincides with Khodorkovsky's birthday, June 26.

Senior Yukos official Alexei Pichugin was accused of plotting the murder of the popular mayor, who resisted Yukos' harsh capitalist practices, for example, by getting rid of social infrastructure in the city. "No one ever doubted that Yukos should be blamed for ordering it,"

the narrator of the documentary said.

Pichugin was sentenced to life in prison in 2007.

Investigators said earlier that the murder was organized by Yukos co-founder Leonid Nevzlin, who left Russia and now lives in Israel. He was tried in absentia and was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2008. On Monday he was sentenced in absentia to six additional years in prison on embezzling shares while involved in the Yukos group, alongside Khodorkovsky and Lebedev.

Khodorkovsky has denied his involvement in the murder of Petukhov, who some experts said might have been a victim of a power struggle in the city.

The documentary was shown during the Emergency Situation NTV show, which has produced a number of films accusing Kremlin opponents of criminal activity. Some of the broadcasts have led to opposition-minded viewers boycotting the station, which is controlled by Gazprom gas producer.

While both Khodorkovsky and Lebedev are set to be freed by the court by 2014, the Investigative Committee is now reviewing an expert report analyzing the second Yukos case. The report was compiled by several experts for the Kremlin's Human Rights Council who said the Yukos owners were not guilty of embezzlement. Investigators said the experts were paid to conduct their research by Yukos.

One of the experts, prominent economist Sergei Guriev, left Russia after being questioned by investigators regarding his assertions about the case. Another expert, former Constitutional Court Judge Tamara Morshakova, is expected to be questioned by investigators on Thursday.

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