

Tycoon Lebedev Avoids Jail Over TV Brawl

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Lebedev talking to reporters in a courtroom after Tuesday's hearing. **Tatyana Makeyeva**

Businessman Alexander Lebedev was found guilty Tuesday of assault for punching former real estate tycoon Sergei Polonsky and sentenced to 150 hours of community service.

Lebedev, who finances anti-Kremlin newspaper Novaya Gazeta, punched Polonsky during a TV talk show in 2011. Lebedev dismissed the criminal case as politically motivated, and his lawyer said that his team would appeal the verdict by a Moscow district court.

"I am ashamed of this verdict," Lebedev's lawyer, Genry Reznik, said after the judge sentenced his client.

Prosecutors had dropped hooliganism charges against the tycoon that could have landed him in jail. The charges refer to a September 2011 incident when Lebedev punched the flamboyant Polonsky during a TV discussion of the financial crisis, sending him tumbling to the ground.

After the recording, Polonsky complained he had sustained a hand injury and that his jeans were ripped.

Novaya Gazeta's relentless criticism of the Kremlin and its investigations into official corruption have put many of its journalists under fire. Four of its reporters have been killed since 2000, including Anna Politkovskaya, a fierce critic of the Kremlin and its policies in Chechnya. She was gunned down in the elevator of her Moscow apartment building in 2006.

Lebedev, estimated to be worth \$1.1 billion, made his money in banking. He has also financed British newspapers the Independent and the Evening Standard. The tycoon has said he was being forced to sell his assets because of pressure by Russia's Federal Security Service, the main KGB successor agency. But Lebedev, a KGB veteran like President Vladimir Putin, has avoided blaming Russia's leader for his woes.

Polonsky has had legal problems himself, spending three months in a Cambodian jail this year for allegedly attacking the crew of a boat after a dispute erupted during a New Year's Eve outing.

Material from Reuters is included in this report.

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