

Channel 7 joins cover-up of Russian tax fraud

Channel 7's trash-sensational 29 July episode of its *Sunday Night* program, called "Dirty Money", accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of being the richest man in the world, worth US\$200 billion, and of parking some of his corrupt gains in Australian banks and companies. Although Channel 7's reporter Matt Doran did a good job of destroying the show's credibility with his ridiculous histrionics, the proof that it was disinformation was its reliance on sinister British-American billionaire Bill Browder.

"Who is Bill Browder?" many people had asked following US President Donald Trump's meeting with Putin in Helsinki. Putin had offered to let US officials come to Russia to witness the 12 Russians indicted for interfering in the US election being questioned, in exchange for Russian authorities similarly being able to participate in the questioning of certain US individuals wanted in Russia. Among those Putin named was Bill Browder, whom the Russian government wants to question about his role in a US\$230 million tax fraud.

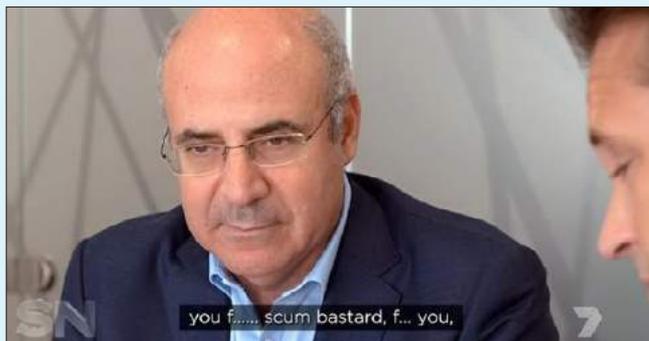
Behind the Magnitsky Act

Browder is central to one of the most contentious disagreements between the USA and Russia, over a 2012 US law called the Magnitsky Act. The law sanctions individual Russian officials for their role in the 2008 death-in-custody of a Russian accountant named Sergei Magnitsky. All of the evidence on which the US Congress based this law, however, came from Bill Browder, who had been Magnitsky's employer, and was not independently confirmed.

Browder had lived in Russia from 1996 to 2005, running a hedge fund called Hermitage Capital, which at one stage was the largest foreign investor in Russia. Behind Hermitage Capital is British banking giant HSBC, the third biggest private bank in the world, which is notorious for its criminality including money laundering for drug cartels and terrorist organisations. HSBC is untouchable, however, due to its connections to the highest levels of the British establishment, including deep ties to British intelligence. Browder's Hermitage Capital made billions in Russia in the chaotic days of the "shock therapy" privatisation and deregulation of the Russian economy, which reforms were directed from London. While a handful of oligarchs and their Western partners made billions, countless impoverished Russians died of starvation, cold and disease.

Browder was expelled from Russia in 2005, and relocated to London with his billions. He claims that in 2007 corrupt Russian officials raided Hermitage's Moscow offices, and stole his companies by re-registering them under other names. Browder says that when he hired a lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky, to look into it, Magnitsky discovered a US\$230 million tax theft from the Russian government; upon his reporting it to the Russian authorities, the corrupt Russian officials jailed Magnitsky and had him beaten to death in prison in November 2009. This is the story that led to the US Congress passing the Magnitsky Act.

A different version of the story is told in a 2016 film called *The Magnitsky Act. Behind the Scenes*. Amazingly, the different version is told by ... Bill Browder! The film was made by Russian dissident filmmaker Andrei



Bill Browder with Channel 7's Matt Doran, dramatically listening to a "death threat". Browder is a liar, proven by his own statements; his claims against Russia are part of a British intelligence disinformation campaign. Photo: screenshot

Nekrasov, who is well known for his anti-Putin films, which is why Browder tasked him with making a film on Magnitsky. As he shot the film, however, Nekrasov noticed irregularities and contradictions in Browder's story, including in relation to Russian-language documents that Browder cited as evidence. Unlike the Western politicians Browder had been able to convince, who couldn't read Russian, Nekrasov could see that the documents didn't say what Browder claimed they said. He also discovered that Magnitsky hadn't been tortured and beaten to death as Browder claimed—Browder himself later stated as much on tape, while Magnitsky's mother said her son had died from a disease, and at worst the prison doctor had been negligent.

When Nekrasov confronted Browder on these contradictions, the real Bill Browder came out, standing over Nekrasov and threatening to destroy his reputation. He effectively has—Western media now call the anti-Putin Nekrasov a Kremlin stooge. Nekrasov didn't back down, however, and his brilliant film includes extensive footage of Browder, in different settings, including a legal deposition under oath in which he is being questioned by the US District Attorney for the Southern District of New York, contradicting the major claims of his Magnitsky story in his own words.

The conclusion that Nekrasov's film leads to is that Bill Browder and HSBC are the likely perpetrators of a US\$230 million tax theft from the Russian government; that Browder's accountant Sergei Magnitsky was best-placed to be aware of this theft, which is why he was arrested by the Russian authorities; and that Magnitsky was one of at least four Russians associated with Browder and this fraud who have wound up dead—raising the question, is somebody covering their tracks?

The Magnitsky Act. Behind the Scenes has only had a handful of screenings around the world, due to Bill Browder's aggressive legal attacks on any effort to show it. For that reason, Browder is free to go on programs like Channel 7's *Sunday Night* and repeat the lies, such as that Magnitsky was beaten to death, that he himself has previously contradicted in Nekrasov's film. Channel 7, for its part, was just an organ for disinformation—but long-time watchers of Australian media might ask, "What else is new?"

The Magnitsky Act. Behind the Scenes is available on-line by emailing the film's producer, Torstein Grude, at torstein@piraya.no