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Rock Critic to 'Protect the People'

By Alexander Bratersky

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Artemy Troitsky holding his 10-month-old daughter Lidia in his Moscow apartment stocked with music CDs. **Alexander Bratersky**

Life has not been easy for legendary rock critic Artemy Troitsky since he moved into public activism: He has already lost a libel suit and now faces another, this time for calling a pro-Kremlin rock star a "poodle."

But in his interview with The Moscow Times, Troitsky said he would not back down.

"I don't want to don the armor of a protector of the people, but circumstances are driving me to it," Troitsky, 56, said this week in his Moscow apartment, holding his infant daughter Lidia in his arms.

Troitsky's resume includes the job of founding editor of Playboy Russia, launched by Independent Media in 1995, but he has been devoting increasingly more time to public campaigning instead of entertainment journalism.

Last year, he supported the drive to save the Moscow region's Khimki forest, slated for partial demolition to make way for a state-backed highway, and campaigned for justice in a road accident that left two women dead after their car collided with the sedan of a LUKoil vice president.

Troitsky's criticism of the policeman involved in the LUKoil probe resulted in a Moscow court slapping him with a fine of 130,000 rubles ($4,700). His legal troubles continue to pile up, as now he faces a defamation lawsuit from Vadim Samoilov, ex-member of the prominent Russian new wave band Agata Kristi.

Samoilov, who sits on the Public Chamber, had reason to be disgruntled, as Troitsky called him "[Vladislav] Surkov's poodle" in a January documentary on pro-Kremlin rock stars by Ren-TV.

Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin's deputy chief of staff and propaganda mastermind, has long had ties to Samoilov, who, with his brother and ex-bandmate Gleb, allegedly even produced a rock record by Surkov in 2003.

Troitsky actually compared Samoilov to British ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair, not a dog, but did so by referencing a scandalous 2002 music video by George Michael where a cartoonish Blair was shown as a poodle following his master, then-U.S. President George W. Bush.

"I don't think that Blair would go and file a lawsuit against George Michael," Troitsky said, adding that he was not seeking to settle the matter out of court.

Samoilov filed two lawsuits, one civil and one criminal, over the "poodle" comment, with both to be reviewed this month, Troitsky said. The critic faces a fine of 1 million rubles ($36,000) in the civil suit and up to a year in prison in the criminal one.

It remained unclear why Samoilov waited almost four months before suing. He was unavailable for comment Thursday, and his aide told The Moscow Times by telephone that the spat is a "private dispute between the two individuals." He spoke on the condition of anonymity since he was not authorized to speak on the matter.

Troitsky said he doubted that Surkov was behind the suit, but added that he "would like him to appear in court as a witness."

His other court battle has not gone well so far. Last week he lost a defamation suit by ex-Moscow police officer Nikolai Khovansky, who has also requested a criminal case to be opened against Troitsky on charges of slander.

Khovansky was the first to arrive on the site of a crash involving the car of LUKoil official Alexander Barkov in Moscow in February 2010. He was also the first to put the blame on the victims, doctors Olga Alexandrina and Vera Sedelnikova, who drove the Citroen that collided with Barkov's Mercedes.

The story sparked a scandal, with critics, including many media, accusing police of covering up for Barkov and his driver. Still, investigators cleared both men in the incident last fall.

The bitter Troitsky went on to award a prize for "the year's worst cop" to Khovansky

in absentia during a show by rock band DDT in November. But the concert, ironically, was attended by Khovansky's daughter, who told her father of the "anti-prize," prompting him to sue.

Khovansky, who has since resigned, said Troitsky's actions "insulted the whole police force," Slon.ru reported in April. But Troitsky, who has appealed the ruling of the Moscow's Gagarinsky District Court, said it had nothing to do with Khovansky's colleagues.

Khovansky "violated presumption of innocence" when he named the perpetrators of the road accident after barely spending any time at the scene, Troitsky said. "He behaved unprofessionally and, in some sense, illegally."

Troitsky said the lawsuits and the proceedings, which he described as an "utter farce," have convinced him that legal attacks on him were punishment for activism.

He could not say who could be behind the campaign, but pointed out that he has done a lot to ruffle the feathers of state authorities.

Indeed, Troitsky has even managed to get his old acquaintance, U2 frontman Bono, to support the campaign in defense of Khimki forest. Bono, who performed with DDT leader Yury Shevchuk in Moscow during a show in August, personally asked President Dmitry Medvedev about the forest at the time — though that did not stop the government from authorizing the partial demolition of the forest in December.

"I don't doubt that he has supporters, but I have more," Troitsky said of Khovansky.

"It's too early for them to finish me off. I have not yet failed, and the case isn't closed yet," Troitsky said.

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