

Lebedev Loses Parole Plea Over Missing Pair of Pants

July 27, 2011



Former Yukos co-owner Platon Lebedev attending a court hearing into his parole request in the Arkhangelsk region town of Velsk on Wednesday. The court ruled late at night that he was not eligible for **Tatyana Makeyeva**

An Arkhangelsk regional court late Wednesday rejected a parole plea by former Yukos co-owner Platon Lebedev, saying he was not eligible because of two breaches of prison rules, including the loss of a pair of trousers.

His lawyers promised to appeal, Interfax reported.

Last month, Lebedev was sent to a prison colony outside the town of Velsk in the Arkhangelsk region to continue serving a 13-year prison sentence. He is eligible for parole now that he has served half of that sentence.

However, hopes for Lebedev's release were dealt a heavy blow Tuesday when prison officials spoke out against it in an official appraisal form, mentioning the missing pants and an oral reprimand for unspecified misbehavior.

Lebedev blamed prison authorities for losing his uniform. His lawyer Yevgeny Rivkin scoffed at the authorities' reasoning. "Do you truly believe that all the personal references read out today, witnesses' evidence, awards and diplomas can outweigh the fact that he gave a cigarette or food to a cellmate, or lost a pair of pants?" Rivkin told prison representative Anatoly Korsunsky in court.

In his final statement to Judge Nikolai Raspopov, Lebedev said it is "unacceptable" there are "political prisoners" in 21st-century Russia. "You have a historic chance to change that."

After a seven-hour session on Wednesday in a hot, non-air conditioned courtroom, journalists were tweeting complaints about the "banya," and live television footage showed audience members sweating and a court guard with half his blue shirt drenched in perspiration. Raspopov responded by adjourning the session until Wednesday night.

Lebedev has been in jail since 2003. He and former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky were arrested on charges of tax evasion widely seen as politically motivated and were convicted on those charges in 2005.

Lebedev and Khodorkovsky were tried together again last year and convicted of stealing oil from Yukos and embezzling the proceeds.

Lebedev was arrested several months before Khodorkovsky, and some observers speculated that he had been held hostage to prevent Khodorkovsky from fleeing the country. Lebedev has four children and three grandchildren.

Yelena Liptser, another Lebedev lawyer, choked back tears as she read a letter to the judge at the parole hearing that was written by the prisoner's 9-year-old daughter.

"I cry almost every day. I cannot sleep at night thinking about my father," Maria Lebedeva wrote in the letter.

Lebedev's wife had asked the judge for permission to read the letter in court, and some news reports said she had actually delivered it.

Dmitry Muratov, the editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta, and film star Natalya Fateyeva also spoke in defense of the Yukos officials in the courtroom.

(AP, MT)

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