

The World's Greatest Con Man

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Boris Berezovsky could have, indeed, committed suicide. He was miserable in the final months of his life. A man who once flew only chartered flights was reduced to bumming \$5,000 off a friend to buy an airplane ticket recently and reportedly sent a note to President Vladimir Putin telling the leader how great he was.

At the height of his powers in 1997, a businessman proposed a project to Berezovsky that he said could reap \$25 million in profits. When Berezovsky turned it down, explaining that he "doesn't get involved with anything worth less than \$50 million," he wasn't grandstanding in the least.

Yet Berezovsky was never a true businessman. Other people ran his businesses for him, people such as billionaire Roman Abramovich, who discarded Berezovsky the moment he fell out of favor with the authorities.

Above all, Berezovsky was a con man. Money was necessary for him, of course, but only as one of the devilish addictions that dominated his life: power, influence and sex.

Berezovsky had a nasty habit of lying. One of Berezovsky's favorite tricks was to call someone

and inform them that he had appointed them to an influential post when, in fact, he had done nothing of the sort. He had only been present in the Kremlin when the appointment was made.

Berezovsky was the most highly placed con man in history, and he had an almost superhuman ability to translate his delirious fantasies into reality.

He was not the sole force behind Putin's rise to power: That was actually a decision made by "the Family," former President Boris Yeltsin's inner circle. But Berezovsky sincerely believed that he was responsible for Putin's political rise in 1999 and had no qualms about reminding everyone — including Putin — of it. That proved to be his fatal mistake.

Even after Berezovsky was no longer calling the shots, Abramovich paid him \$2 billion for his stake in Sibneft and RusAl. Over the next 10 years, Berezovsky spent every last penny of that money on women, luxury villas, yachts, chartered flights and pointless lawsuits.

Following his unsuccessful lawsuit against Abramovich, Berezovsky was a broken man, a complete wreck. In reality, he should have won the case, but he torpedoed his own chances with his deeply rooted habit of lying — this time under oath in a London court.

What he didn't understand is that you can act like that in Moscow and get away with it, but not in London. In that case, Berezovsky claimed he had created Sibneft and opened the doors to the Kremlin halls of power. But those words held little weight because he had testified during a previous legal dispute with Forbes that he had no relationship to Sibneft and was not the "godfather of the Kremlin."

Losing the case to Abramovich was the final blow for Berezovsky, and it left him with huge debts and no hope. Nobody needed him anymore — not even his own family members, who had come to see Berezovsky as their endless source of wealth.

Berezovsky, who not long ago wrote a letter about how he would stage a revolution in Russia, ended up appealing to Putin for permission to return to his homeland. Putin ignored him. After that, there was nothing left for him but to die.

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