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Western Experts Cry Foul Over Russian Books Published in Their Names

By Howard Amos

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While Russia has strict domestic copyright laws, the country is known for piracy of international music, film and book content.

Prominent Western experts and journalists accused a Russian publishing house Sunday of pirating their work and printing books using their names without their permission or prior knowledge.

Journalists Luke Harding and Edward Lucas and U.S.-based Russia expert Donald Jensen confirmed to The Moscow Times that they did not know anything about Russian-language books allegedly written by them and produced by Moscow publishing house Algoritm.

"Absolutely no idea about this book. I have not given permission of any kind," Lucas, the author of several books about Russia, said in written comments when asked whether he had penned "How the West Lost to Putin," a book published last year by Algoritm. "It is clearly a breach of copyright," he added.

All the books in question appear in Algoritm's Project Putin series, which comprises over 20 different titles examining various aspects of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his political views.

While Russia has strict domestic copyright laws, the country is known for piracy of international music, film and book content. The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative placed Russia on its priority watch list in its annual report on the world's worst copyright violators, called the Special 301 Report, issued in April.

Jensen said he was not aware of Algoritm's "Putin and the U.S.A.," printed earlier this year under his name and available to buy in Moscow bookstores, until contacted by The Moscow Times on Sunday.

"Wow, I have not written such a book in any language, it looks to be a compendium of my [U.S. federal news service] Voice of America commentaries (with an inaccurate summary)," Jensen, a fellow at the Washington-based Center for Transatlantic Relations think tank, said by e-mail.

The director of the Algoritm publishing house, Sergei Nikolayev, admitted by telephone Sunday that prior permission was not sought from Harding, a journalist at Britain's The Guardian newspaper, to use his writings in a 2015 book called "Nobody Except Putin."

"If he [Harding] surfaces then we will come to some agreement and pay him a fee," said Nikolayev.

He declined to comment on Lucas or Jensen's claims, saying he was not familiar with their cases and had been off work for several days.

Harding said in written comments that his publisher, Guardian Faber, will decide whether to take legal action against Algoritm once they have had time to investigate.

"The first I heard about it was a couple of weeks ago when a Russian friend said he'd spotted my 'book' in a Moscow bookstore ... normally publishers buy rights, translate, then put out an edition," said Harding.

On its website, Algoritm describes the book under Harding's name as "developing the idea" of "Mafia State" (the name of Harding's authorized book) — a position that, it said, "is symptomatic of certain circles of British politicians, journalists and public figures."

Other titles in the same Algoritm collection include those apparently authored by former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, murdered Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov and Russian political scientists Stanislav Belkovsky, Andrei Piontkovsky and Vladimir Pribylovsky.

Piontkovsky said Sunday that he had given permission for his writings to be published in three separate volumes for Algoritm and praised the publishing house's series on Putin. "It's a good series and they have put out a lot of good books," he said by telephone.

Algoritm, founded in 1996, describes itself on its website as one of Russia's leading publishers specializing in controversial political and social content. It has printed works by a number

of senior Russian officials including Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin and nationalist firebrand Vladimir Zhirinovsky.

Moscow-based U.S. journalist Michael Bohm also alleged that a book titled "President Putin's Mistake" published under his name was issued without his knowledge.

"There was no agreement," he said by telephone Sunday.

Bohm, a former Moscow Times editor, said that he was contacted by Algoritm in April about a possible collaboration, but discussions fizzled out without anything being signed.

The material in the book is taken from his interviews and articles, Bohm said, including articles originally published in English.

"When you translate someone's work, there's always the risk of translation and mistranslation ... there are mistakes in there," Bohm said, adding that Algoritm had not responded to an enquiry when he discovered the book last month.

Algoritm head Nikolayev said in an interview with radio station Ekho Moskvy on Sunday that the publishing house had held talks with Bohm.

"I think that we will sign an agreement and everything will be fine," Nikolayev said.

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