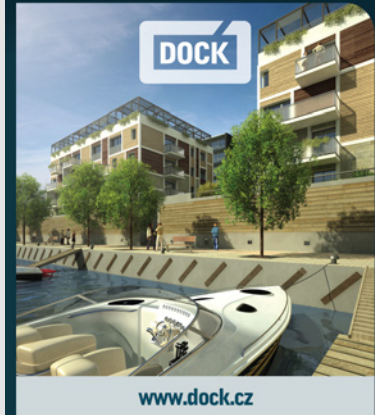


Call the Convict

Vladimír Železný, once one of the most influential people in the Czech Republic, is a convicted criminal. He was given a two-year suspended sentence for VAT fraud on the importation of paintings. How is it possible, in a land where almost no one of any importance is convicted of anything, that Železný has been hung out to dry? After all, it wasn't long ago that he was the one ruling over some of the Czech courts. Železný has blamed his troubles on the long arm of Ronald Lauder, the U.S. media mogul from whom he swiped TV Nova more than a decade ago. Lauder of course didn't force Železný to commit tax evasion, but it's apparently true that his people on the ground in Prague helped guide the case against Železný through the courts. Lauder no doubt feels personal satisfaction, but for the people of the CR the conviction has surprisingly little significance. It won't prevent Železný from being treated like a VIP, and it will merely reinforce the belief that the rogues are only punished if they fight among themselves.

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