



Supper club: Theresa May with ministers, fellow guests and their host Lubov Chernukhin, circled

WIFE OF EX-PUTIN CRONY'S £135,000 DINNER WITH PM

EXCLUSIVE

By John Stevens, Jason Groves and Jake Hurfurt

THERESA May and six female Cabinet members had a night out with the wife of a former Vladimir Putin ally who had donated £135,000 at a Tory fundraiser.

Lubov Chernukhin was entertained by the Prime Minister at

She won auction at Tory fund-raiser to have intimate supper with May and SIX female Cabinet members at royals' favourite hotel

the five-star Goring Hotel in Belgravia on Monday evening.

It is understood the banker won the dinner as an auction prize at the Conservative Party's Black and White ball earlier this year. The £135,000 bid takes Mrs Chernukhin's donations to

the Tories over the past seven years past the £1million mark.

The party has insisted that Mrs Chernukhin, now a British citizen, is not a 'Putin crony'. But the money will raise fresh questions about the Tories' links to Russia just a year after

the Salisbury spy poisoning. Five years ago, David Cameron faced questions after Mrs Chernukhin successfully bid £160,000 at a party fundraising dinner to play tennis against him

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Eton mess, wine and cream of the Cabinet

And here's who Russian got for her winning bid



1 Karen Bradley, Northern Ireland Sec
 2 Baroness Evans, Leader of the Lords
 3 Caroline Nokes, Immigration minister
 4 Amber Rudd, Work and Pensions Sec
 5 Andrea Leadsom, Leader of the Commons
 6 Liz Truss, Treasury Chief Sec
 7 Theresa May
 8 Lubov Chernukhin



elizabeth.truss.mp And it's ladies night... #cabinetandfriends #girlpower

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and Boris Johnson. The former PM was accused of hypocrisy over the donation, which came at a time when he was pushing for tougher Western sanctions against Moscow in response to its annexation of Crimea and the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17.

Today's revelations are likely to lead to similar accusations against Mrs May, who has pledged to get tough on the issue of Russian money and influence in the UK in the wake of last year's nerve agent attack in Salisbury.

The PM warned at that time that it could no longer be 'business as usual' with Russia.

Security minister Ben Wallace went further, pledging a wide-ranging crackdown on Russian money in London. He said oligarchs could be hit with 'unexplained wealth orders' by the courts if they were unable to demonstrate the source of their assets. It was part of a strategy of making life uncomfortable for them in London.

Liz Truss, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, revealed news of

'Fair amount of wine was drunk'

Monday night's dinner by posting a photograph on Instagram of Mrs May, several of her female ministers and a group of mystery women at the Goring, which is near Buckingham Palace.

The picture includes Work and Pensions Secretary Amber Rudd, Leader of the Commons Andrea Leadsom, Leader of the Lords, Baroness Evans, Northern Ireland Secretary Karen Bradley and immigration minister Caroline Nokes. Miss Truss, who has become known for her regular and eye-catching updates on social media, wrote the caption: 'And it's ladies night, cabinetandfriends, girlpower.'

Downing Street and the Conservative Party yesterday refused to comment on the identities of the women beside Mrs May in the picture, claiming it was a private event.

But the Daily Mail discovered that it was a dinner thrown for Mrs Chernukhin and her friends

after she successfully bid for the prize at the ball.

They were served a three-course meal of asparagus, beef Wellington and Eton mess.

A source said: 'It was bit like Cabinet at the start, very polite, but then a fair amount of wine was drunk and then it became a very relaxed and talkative dinner.'

The guests were also thought to include Lady Nuttall, a fashion designer who had an affair with a cousin of the Queen in the Bahamas, and Lucy Hyde-Dunn, a vet who is the wife of the head of the Dragon School in Oxford.

Louise Petano-Heathcote, who is standing for the Tories in local elections in Oxford on Thursday, is thought to be another of the women in the photograph. The wife of the artist Peregrine Heathcote commented on Instagram: 'Fabulous women, wonderful evening.'

Electoral Commission records show Mrs Chernukhin was declared an 'impermissible donor' in 2012 when she attempted to give £10,000 to the Tories. Since then, however, she

has made donations to the party worth more than £903,000, which have all been accepted, including £389,000 last year.

The £135,000 donation for the auction prize has yet to be declared on the Electoral Commission website. At last year's Black and White Ball Mrs Chernukhin won two more auctions

'Relaxed and talkative dinner'

– £20,000 to dine with Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson and £30,000 to dine with Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson. Earlier this year, Mrs Chernukhin donated £9,500 to the war chest of Tory chairman Brandon Lewis.

It was not known whether the match involving Mr Cameron and Mr Johnson ever went ahead, but last March – following the spy poisoning – Mr Johnson finally admitted it had. He said: 'It's very important that we do not allow a miasma of suspicion about all Russians in London – and indeed all rich

Russians in London – to be created.'

Mrs May faced criticism last summer after it emerged she had accepted another six-figure donation from Mrs Chernukhin.

At the time, Labour's shadow cabinet minister Jon Trickett said: 'Theresa May needs to explain what checks have taken place, and why her party has accepted money from individuals with links to Putin's regime, despite her promises.'

The Tories have repeatedly defended taking money from Mrs Chernukhin, saying her husband, Vladimir, who served as deputy finance minister under Putin in the early 2000s, fell out with the president after being dismissed from his job in charge of a state-run bank before moving to London.

Both the Conservative Party and Downing St refused to comment last night.

There is no suggestion that Mr and Mrs Chernukhin's wealth is illegitimate.

The Goring is where the Duchess of Cambridge spent her last night as a commoner ahead of her wedding to William.



£1m donor: Lubov Chernukhin is a British citizen



Vladimir Chernukhin with Putin in 2002 and, far left, at court in February. His wife paid to play tennis with Boris Johnson, left

By Jemma Buckley

LUBOV Chernukhin is a long-standing Tory donor and the wife of former Russian deputy finance minister Vladimir Chernukhin.

She is believed to have given the Conservatives more than £903,000 in donations since 2012.

Mrs Chernukhin, 46, held a Russian passport before gaining British citizenship and settling in London. She and her husband have a £7million mansion overlooking Regent's Park.

In 2014 she paid £160,000 in an auction at the Tory summer fundraising ball for the 'ultimate tennis match' with former prime minister David Cameron and Boris Johnson.

But controversy over her husband's past Kremlin links provoked an embarrassing backlash after Russia's military intervention in Ukraine resulted in the shooting down of passenger jet MH17.

In June last year, the Tory party was accused of 'sheer hypocrisy' after it was revealed it had accepted £50,000 in donations from Mrs Chernukhin on the same day that Theresa May pointed the finger at Russia over the poisoning of spy Sergei Skripal in Salisbury.

Last year Mrs Chernukhin gave at least £389,500 to the Conservatives. At one point she bid £30,000 to have dinner with Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson and tour Churchill's War Rooms. It is unclear whether the event went ahead.

As a British citizen she is eligible to make donations to UK political parties.

But in 2012 Electoral Commission records show she was declared an 'impermissible donor' when she attempted to give £10,000 to the Tories. This is thought to have been because she was not on the electoral roll at the time.

Mrs Chernukhin is believed to have married Mr Chernukhin in November 2007. He served as a minister in Vladimir Putin's first presi-

Vlad's ex-minister worth £230m ... and wife who's given a fortune to the Tories

denied in 2000 and 2002. He then became chairman of Vnesheconombank, a state-owned investment bank.

However, he is said to have fallen out of favour with the Russian president for his loyalty to Mikhail Kasyanov, a critic of Mr Putin, and was dismissed from his role, leading the couple to settle in Britain.

Earlier this year it emerged that City financier Nat Rothschild created a £275,000-a-year job for Mr Chernukhin in 2004 to enable him to get a British visa.

Mr Chernukhin told a court that he fled Russia after being tipped off that he was to be

arrested in a snoop on opponents of Mr Putin.

He said that once he had been in Britain for five years, and could obtain leave to remain in the UK, he repaid £1.3million to Mr Rothschild because the job had required no actual work.

Details of the arrangement emerged during a courtroom battle between Mr Chernukhin, 49, and the oligarch Oleg Deripaska, 51, over ownership of a textile factory on a valuable 22-acre site in central Moscow.

Although Mr Chernukhin was a state employee until 2004, the court heard he had

amassed £230million at the time from his 'real estate empire'. He was formerly in a 16-year relationship with Lolita Danilina, who was also dragged into the court battle, although he did not marry her.

Mrs Chernukhin was educated in the United States, studying at Merrimack College in Massachusetts from 1990 to 1995 and completing an MBA at the prestigious Stern School in New York between 1997 and 1999.

In documents filed with the UK's Companies House, she has variously listed her occupation as banker, investment director and consultant.

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