Roman Polanski denied bail in Switzerland

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The Swiss Justice Ministry rejected on Tuesday film director Roman Polanski's appeal for an immediate release from custody. Polanski was arrested September 26 upon arriving in Zürich, Switzerland, to attend a film festival and has remained in prison ever since, awaiting possible extradition to the United States.

In a statement, justice ministry spokesman Folco Galli declared, "In our view, there is still a very high risk that he will flee and that a release on bail or other measures after a release cannot guarantee Polanski's presence in the extradition procedure." Polanski's lawyers had argued that their client should be released from prison and allowed to return to his home in Gstaad, Switzerland, while the extradition process played out.

Attorney Herve Temime, speaking on Polanski's behalf, rejected the ministry's assertion that his client might leave the country, saying Polanski "would not leave the Swiss territory during the whole extradition procedure," and that the director would, "respect all the obligations that may be imposed upon him in order to guarantee that commitment."

The consensus among Swiss legal experts is that Polanski will almost certainly be forced to remain in prison for months while awaiting extradition. The US government has up to 60 days in which to file a formal request for extradition. According to the Swiss Justice Ministry, that request has yet to be made.

Polanski was arrested in Zürich in compliance with US demands that the director be held for extradition to answer for a crime he committed in Los Angeles, California, in 1977. Polanski pled guilty in that year to the charge of "unlawful sexual intercourse" with Samantha Geimer (then Samantha Gailey), a 13-year-old model he had photographed for *Vogue* magazine.

The court proceedings that extended into 1978 were characterized by improper and illegal conduct on the part of the presiding judge, Laurence J. Rittenband, and media sensationalism, which the judge only courted and encouraged.

Polanski's decision to flee the United States in February 1978, before the resolution of the case, came after the judge rejected recommendations made following two separate psychiatric evaluations. Polanski was found not to be a "Mentally Disordered Sex Offender" and probation was recommended.

During the course of Polanski's case, Judge Rittenband sought to circumvent Polanski's legal right to appeal, as well as force the filmmaker to waive his right to any deportation hearings that might occur as the result of his legal troubles. In a truly bizarre scenario, Rittenband also ordered both prosecution and defense attorneys to participate in charades in which they would argue in court for outcomes that had already been arranged in the judge's chambers, so that Rittenband could save face in the press.

The intense media frenzy that surrounded the Polanski case in 1978 has begun anew with his arrest in Switzerland. Once again, the machinery of the bourgeois media has marshaled its resources to distract and disorient a mass audience. Deeply reactionary comments on the Polanski arrest can be found in the print editions or Internet publications of all the major newspapers as well as the cable news channels.

Among the more vicious attacks on Polanski came from journalist and commentator Cokie Roberts, who said of Polanski during a segment of the ABC Sunday morning round table show "This Week" that was shown exclusively on the Internet, "As far as I'm concerned, just take him out and shoot him."

The film director is regularly painted in the media as a wealthy, jet-setting member of the elite who flaunts his freedom and continues to live in luxury while escaping the consequences for his past crimes.

Polanski is pursued with a vigor and resourcefulness that is entirely absent when it comes to arresting and

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prosecuting those responsible for mass murder, torture and other crimes of US imperialism. The most pressing and essential social questions are concealed or ignored in the media while an almost hysterical level of outrage is brought to a boil over the “elite” Polanski whose incarceration will bring absolutely no benefit to the world’s population.

As the Polanski case progresses and the media continues its disorienting assault on the director, it is important to maintain a critical eye and remain aware of the class issues underlying and motivating the entire affair.

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