

The serious questions raised by the Dominique Strauss-Kahn affair

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The arrest of French financier and politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn in New York City on sexual assault charges and his continued imprisonment is a disturbing event with far-reaching implications.

Strauss-Kahn is the managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), perhaps the most powerful global capitalist financial institution, and a prominent figure in the French Socialist Party, one of that country's leading big business parties. He was expected to announce soon his candidacy for the presidency in 2012, and polls in France had him leading his rivals, President Nicolas Sarkozy and extreme right-winger Marine Le Pen of the National Front.

In his class position, privilege and social outlook, Strauss-Kahn stands for everything the *World Socialist Web Site* opposes. But he is also a human being who is entitled to democratic rights, which include legal due process and the presumption of innocence until proven guilty. Judging from the treatment of Strauss-Kahn since his arrest and the coverage of this event in the American media, this presumption does not exist.

Neither we nor anyone else—outside the accused and the accuser (and, perhaps, other interested and unnamed parties)—know exactly what went on in Strauss-Kahn's suite at the Sofitel Hotel in Manhattan on Sunday. Whatever information the public possesses has emerged courtesy of the New York City Police Department, the alleged victim's lawyer, and the mass media. None of these can be considered reliable sources.

As of yet, no one has heard Mr. Strauss-Kahn's side of the story. Rather, he has been subjected to a calculated process of humiliation and dehumanization—such as the disgusting “perp walk”—whose obvious purpose is to convict the accused in the public's mind even before an indictment has been handed down.

Rape is an execrable crime and anyone who is found guilty of this offense must be held accountable. However, it is a fact, shameful and undeniable, that allegations of sexual misconduct have been used relentlessly, and not only in the United States, to destroy targeted individuals. The case of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange comes most immediately to mind.

The fact that allegations of rape and other lesser forms of sexual misconduct have been used for political ends does not mean that Strauss-Kahn is a victim of a conspiracy. However, it would require a staggering level of credulousness to dismiss out of hand, prior to the most careful investigation, the possibility that Strauss-Kahn—a man whose decisions have far-reaching political and financial consequences—has fallen into a well-laid trap.

The ancient question *Cui Prodest?*—Who profits?—must arise in the investigation of an allegation whose immediate consequence, regardless of the final outcome of the case, will in all likelihood be the

removal of the head of the International Monetary Fund and the destruction of the political career of a possible future president of France. Who would stand to gain from Mr. Strauss-Kahn's transfer to an American prison? Certainly, this is the sort of question that the great French novelist Alexander Dumas, the author of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, would have asked.

But such curiosity is not to be found among the editors of the *New York Times*. Rather, in yet another example of its penchant for gutter journalism, the newspaper yesterday published no less than three columns—by Maureen Dowd, Stephen Clarke and Jim Dwyer—which revel in Strauss-Kahn's humiliation, treat the allegation of rape as if there was no question of its truth, and provocatively incite their readers against the accused. Each of the columns appeals to their readers' ignorance of due process and to the basest instincts. The filthy level of these essays is indicated by the title chosen by Mr. Clarke for his piece: “Droit du Dirty Old Men.”

The worst of the three is supplied by Maureen Dowd. During the course of her long tenure as a columnist at the *Times* she has provided innumerable examples of prurient obsessions (readers may refer to her writings on the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal), which are made all the more distasteful by her uncontrolled subjective nastiness.

Most recently, before turning her attention to the case of Strauss-Kahn, Dowd was celebrating the extra-legal assassination of Osama bin Laden (“a win that made us feel like Americans again”). In her May 17 column, “Powerful and Primitive,” Dowd begins: “Oh, she wanted it. She wanted it bad. That's what every hard-working, God-fearing, young widow who breaks her back doing menial labor at a Times Square hotel to support her teenage daughter, justify her immigration status and take advantage of the opportunities in America wants—a crazed, rutting, wrinkly old satyr charging naked out of a bathroom, lunging at her and dragging her around the room, caveman-style.”

What evidence is this lurid paragraph based on? What information does Dowd possess? Has she even interviewed the accuser? Does Dowd even know what the alleged victim has told the police? For the *Times* columnist, the presumption of innocence is non-existent. Rather, she is outraged by the very suggestion that Strauss-Kahn is not guilty and, even worse, that he may have been set up. As in all cases involving allegations of sexual misconduct that Dowd has written on, the guilt of the accused is the operative assumption.

Dowd goes on: “Strauss-Kahn's French defenders are throwing around nutty conspiracy theories, sounding like the Pakistanis about Osama. Some have suggested that he was the victim of a honey-pot arranged by the Sarkozy forces.”

Impossible? Why is it mad to believe that Strauss-Kahn has

powerful enemies, who have the means to set him up, or, at the very least, exploit the opportunity presented by the affair to finish him politically? To *exclude* that possibility is not only politically absurd, it effectively closes off a critical area of investigation. Can one imagine that investigators would not ask Strauss-Kahn if there were people who might be interested in, and capable of, setting him up? Or that investigators should not look into the associations of his accuser?

To understand how powerful forces are using the current scandal, one need only refer to a front-page story in Wednesday's *Wall Street Journal* headlined "Pressure Is Building on Jailed IMF Chief." The piece states that the Obama administration has "strongly signaled it was time for the International Monetary Fund to replace Dominique Strauss-Kahn as its chief, indicating that he can no longer be effective in his job." Clearly, the arrest of Strauss-Kahn is seen by the US government as a political opportunity.

In his first public comments on the case, the *Journal* reports, US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner "called for more formal board recognition that the IMF's No. 2 official, American John Lipsky, who has filled in since Mr. Strauss-Kahn's arrest, will continue in the role for an interim period."

It is understood that Strauss-Kahn's replacement will have important policy implications, and a bitter struggle is already underway between European governments and the United States over the selection of a successor. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the Europeans want to hold on to the top post at the IMF. "But the US," the *Journal* writes, "as the largest single shareholder in the organization, will play a key role in determining the outcome."

Maureen Dowd may not be particularly informed about the many critical interests at stake in the replacement of Strauss-Kahn, but the higher-ups at the *New York Times* are not naïve. It is an established fact that the newspaper's executive editor, Bill Keller, coordinates the *Times'* coverage of issues of critical importance with the US government. In this case, the inflammatory columns of Dowd and others contribute to the pressure that is being exerted to force Strauss-Kahn's resignation.

French official public opinion has understandably been distressed both by the manner of Strauss-Kahn's arrest and the decision by US law enforcement to parade him in handcuffs before the paparazzi. But the shock only indicates how little such Europeans understand of what has been developing in America in recent decades.

Right-wing journalist and philosopher Bernard Henry Lévy complains legitimately about the scandalous treatment of Strauss-Kahn, who, he says, has been "thrown to the dogs," adding that nothing "permits the entire world to revel in the spectacle... of this handcuffed figure, his features blurred by 30 hours of detention and questioning."

Figures like Lévy, however, have blinded themselves to social conditions in the US, so enamored have they been by "free market" propaganda. Lévy hasn't cared to notice that more than 2.2 million people—the overwhelming majority treated as cruelly as Strauss-Kahn, or worse—are currently incarcerated in the human rights nightmare known as the United States.

The sad truth is that the vicious and vindictive character of the American "justice" system comes to light only when someone famous falls into its clutches.

The posturing of Dowd and others of her ilk as defenders of the poor and downtrodden is entirely hypocritical. The columnist claims that Americans "could pride themselves" that in the Strauss-Kahn case "justice will be done without regard to wealth, class or privilege." She

adds, "It's an inspiring story about America, where even a maid can have dignity and be listened to when she accuses one of the most powerful men in the world of being a predator."

What rubbish! In everyday life, chambermaids and the rest of the "help" are invisible to the upper middle class to which Dowd belongs.

Individuals such as Lévy have raised concerns, but the French establishment has responded with cowardice, or, as in the case of Nicolas Sarkozy, who sees a rival potentially eliminated, on the basis of short-term political calculations.

There is, no doubt, a real element of fear and intimidation in France and throughout Europe when it comes to the behavior of the US, which operates around the world like a criminal syndicate. Washington demanded (and gained) the release of CIA murderer Raymond Davis from a Pakistani prison in March. Can anyone imagine a leading American political figure being treated in Paris as Strauss-Kahn has been in New York with impunity?

The Strauss-Kahn affair raises critical questions. The *World Socialist Web Site* insists on the presumption of innocence and other fundamental democratic rights. There is no credible reason why he should not be released on bail. Those on the political left who foolishly believe that Strauss-Kahn's fate is a matter of indifference—or should even be welcomed as just punishment for his personal wealth and political sins—understand nothing of the importance of democratic rights. It is worth pointing out, moreover, that socialist convictions are not based on small-minded vengefulness.

One certainly hopes that a competent defense, not cowed by the immense pressure into accepting a plea deal, will work to uncover the facts. For the authorities, especially if they are motivated by political goals, it is already a matter of "mission accomplished"—the destruction of Strauss-Kahn's political standing.

When one concentrates on the facts of the case as reported, there exists ample reason—certainly at this point—to entertain very serious questions, well beyond the level of "reasonable doubt," about the entire affair.

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