

Dominique Strauss-Kahn accuser goes public

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The 32-year-old Guinean-born chambermaid who has accused French politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn of sexual assault at a New York City hotel went public with her charges over the past week, providing her side of the story in widely circulated interviews with ABC News and *Newsweek* magazine.

In addition, Nafissatou Diallo's entrance into the Manhattan District Attorney's office July 27, "was captured by photographers who had been told she was coming" (*New York Times*, July 28). Then on Thursday, Diallo spoke briefly at a church in Brooklyn, supported by prominent African American politicians, clergy and academics.

According to Diallo's lawyers, her appearances were an opportunity for her to present her case and also apply pressure on prosecutors to proceed with charges against Strauss-Kahn.

A status hearing in the case scheduled for August 1 has been postponed until August 23. Lawyers for Strauss-Kahn commented, "We hope that by August 23 he [Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr.] will have reached the decision to dismiss." However, Vance's office merely commented that "the investigation into this pending criminal case is continuing."

The American media has taken the opportunity once again to stoke up the affair. A great deal of ink is being spilled over Diallo, the 'poor,' 'proud' chambermaid, by media figures who regularly look through such employees as though they do not exist. The greatest skepticism ought to be exercised in regard to the current attitude of the media. Does any such campaign occur in the press and on the television news in the US without ulterior motives?

The Strauss-Kahn case, first of all, is a diversion from the savage budget cuts being organized by Democrats and Republicans in Washington, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and generally deteriorating social conditions. Furthermore, significant geopolitical issues must come into play. Strauss-Kahn was the managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the time of the incident in May; he was subsequently forced to resign. He was also a leading prospect to become the French Socialist Party's candidate for president in next year's election.

Any consideration of the present affair that leaves out account these extraordinary circumstances is either uninformed or deliberately misleading. In the case of the sensationalizing and

superficial American media, both factors no doubt come into play. The liberal-left and "far left" media, as is their habit, simply trail behind the bigger outlets.

In addition, the current media campaign is aimed at covering up for the Manhattan District Attorney's office, whose handling of the case has been outrageous. The treatment of Strauss-Kahn, who was subjected to the infamous "perp walk," as well as being incarcerated without bail at Riker's Island, only brings to glaring public light the brutal everyday operations of the justice system in America.

Prominent attorney Alan Dershowitz terms Vance and his colleagues "Nancy Grace prosecutors," after the vile cable television talk show host. "The prosecution presented its case in public," adds Dershowitz, hardly a political progressive, "as if there were no doubt about the alleged victim's credibility or the complete guilt of the alleged offender. ... The whole manner in which this case was handled undercuts the presumption of innocence."

The chambermaid's credibility was called into question at the end of June when various facts about her background were made public, indicating that she had lied on numerous previous occasions, including about an alleged gang-rape, that she had discussed money issues in relation to the case over the telephone and that her story about her actions after the alleged attack were misleading.

In her interviews this week, Diallo repeats claims that she was attacked by Strauss-Kahn May 14 when she walked into a room at the exclusive Sofitel room she believed was empty. She insists that he was like a "crazy man to me," and forced her to perform oral sex. *Newsweek* notes that Diallo "is about 5 feet 10, considerably taller than Strauss-Kahn, and ... has a sturdy build."

In reporting Diallo's story, *Newsweek* bends over backward to lend credence to her story. But its reporter, John Solomon, feels obliged to comment: "Occasionally as Diallo talked, she wept, and there were moments when the tears seemed forced. Almost all questions about her past in West Africa were met with vague responses."

In fact, as we now know, Diallo lied on her application for asylum to the US in 2004, alleging that she had suffered persecution. It turns out as well that she had padded her income tax refund by claiming as a dependent a child who was a friend's. Diallo also misrepresented her income to qualify for

public housing in New York City.

Then there is the perhaps more significant fact of her association with an individual currently in prison for possession of 400 pounds of marijuana. According to reports, she spoke with him on the telephone a day after the alleged attack and discussed Strauss-Kahn's wealth and prominence, telling him "Don't worry ... I know what I'm doing."

Investigators have also found bank accounts revealing deposits of thousands of dollars in Arizona, Georgia, New York and Pennsylvania to an account in Diallo's name. In fact, the deposits add up to some \$100,000.

According to a July 2 *New York Times* account of an encounter between Diallo, her lawyer and prosecutors, "The woman had repeatedly said that the Sofitel was her only source of income. Now, investigators confronted her with the bank records. The woman, silent, turned to [attorney] Mr. [Kenneth] Thompson, seemingly pleading for direction on how to respond. He seemed startled. 'He was speechless,' the well-placed official said."

It was also revealed that "she was paying hundreds of dollars every month in phone charges to five companies" (*New York Times*, June 30).

Thompson's response to all this is "You don't have to be Mother Teresa to be a victim of a crime." True enough, and there is no way of knowing exactly what happened in the hotel room on May 14. However, when a systematic pattern of lying emerges, including lies about a previous rape, why should such an individual be believed?

The remarkable fact, which must have political significance, is the refusal of the Manhattan District Attorney to drop the case against Strauss-Kahn, which the US media admitted regretfully was "collapsing" a month ago.

The *least likely* scenario is that none of this has to do with Strauss-Kahn's prominent position in France and the upcoming presidential elections. An objective observer might be tempted to conclude that some party or parties are quite determined to see that his candidacy never sees the light of day.

The fact that Strauss-Kahn is a bourgeois politician, whose role at the IMF and in the French Socialist Party, one of the country's two leading big business parties, puts him entirely at odds with the interests of the working class does not take away from the reactionary character of the campaign by US authorities and media against him. What is being done to Strauss-Kahn today, will be done to other, considerably more sympathetic figures tomorrow.

In fact, we don't have to wait that long. The framing up of WikiLeaks' Julian Assange, again with a chorus of support from the liberal-left, should give some indication of the foul political motives at work in such cases.

Numerous legal experts have suggested that Diallo's current publicity campaign is a last-ditch effort to press prosecutors, and that it may indicate her legal team believes the case will be dropped. It is extremely unusual for alleged victims to publicly

campaign for prosecution and provide details of an alleged crime.

The Associated Press (AP) cites the comments of Bennett L. Gershman, a Pace Law School professor and former prosecutor: "It's an extraordinary turn of events, I would say, for her to go on a kind of lobbying, public relations campaign to get this case tried."

AP continues: "Prosecutors generally discourage potential witnesses in criminal cases from speaking outside court while a case is pending, partly to avoid creating multiple accounts that could diverge, even slightly."

The *Times* noted, "Lawyers not involved in the case said it was virtually unheard of for someone alleging sexual assault in a highly publicized case to come forward ... to speak to the news media while prosecutors were still investigating."

Strauss-Kahn's attorneys William R. Taylor and Benjamin Brafman issued a statement July 24, declaring, "Ms. Diallo is the first accuser in history to conduct a media campaign to persuade a prosecutor to pursue charges against a person from whom she wants money. ... Her lawyers know that her claim for money suffers a fatal blow when the criminal charges are dismissed, as they must be." They conclude, "It is time for this unseemly circus to stop."

There would seem little question but that mercenary concerns are involved. Diallo plans to file a civil suit, Thompson has made clear.

According to the *New York Times*, lawyers for Strauss-Kahn and Diallo had discussions in mid-June "exploring a possible resolution." The *Times* reported that an individual "briefed on the matter said that Mr. Thompson had sought a monetary settlement." Thompson denies the allegation, "At no point in time did I ever convey a monetary settlement demand to Dominique Strauss-Kahn's lawyers." Taylor later described Thompson's statement as "extraordinarily misleading."

The "unseemly circus" is not restricted to the jurisdiction of the Manhattan District Attorney, but extends at least as far as Paris. Lawyers for Diallo and Tristane Banon, the 32-year-old French writer who claims that Strauss-Kahn tried to rape her in 2003, met July 19 in Vance's office. Banon's lawyer, David Koubbi, had earlier strenuously opposed joining the two cases.

As the *Guardian* noted, "Banon only launched her lawsuit against Strauss-Kahn after it appeared the American case was falling apart." Her mother, Anne Mansouret, who urged Banon to pursue the issue, *Newsweek* pointed out, "is an ambitious politician in her own right who is often identified with Strauss-Kahn's rivals in the French Socialist Party."



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