

ISO ignores every question of principle in Strauss-Kahn affair

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Socialist Worker, the publication of the International Socialist Organization, has denounced the August 23 dismissal of sexual assault charges against French politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn. It describes the decision by a judge in New York City as “a case of the justice system protecting the wealthy elite.” In the course of the article, the *World Socialist Web Site* comes under attack for its “disgraceful” position on the affair.

The August 29 piece, “Another law for the rich and powerful,” leaves aside every significant political question bound up with this sordid episode.

The authors, Lichi D’Amelio and Natalia Tylim, make the argument that the alleged victim, 32-year-old immigrant hotel worker, Nafissatou Diallo, was the target of a “media smear campaign” and that this “lavishly funded campaign to discredit Diallo” launched by Strauss-Kahn and his lawyers “seems to have worked.”

After referring to a medical examination of the alleged victim, which prosecutors found did not support claims of a forcible sexual encounter (for example, the absence of Strauss-Kahn’s DNA under the complainant’s fingernails), D’Amelio and Tylim write, “Despite these facts, the media cast doubt even on the question of whether there was physical evidence.” And they go on, “The callous treatment of Diallo and the hostility toward her claims is typical of what many women and girls encounter when they come forward with an accusation of sexual assault.”

It is an easy matter to arrive at a given conclusion if you arrange your facts and arguments in such a way that no other conclusion is possible.

The presentation of the case in the *Socialist Worker* article is glaringly at odds with reality. It is designed to fit a definite political agenda and satisfy certain political constituencies.

To contend or imply that Strauss-Kahn was freed and charges against him dropped through the connivance of friends in high places, that the US justice system was itching to release the former IMF managing director, and that the American media was solidly in his camp against his accuser is preposterous. This stands reality on its head.

Perhaps the authors did not read a newspaper or watch television in the aftermath of the incident at the Sofitel hotel in Manhattan involving Strauss-Kahn and Ms. Diallo. Let us fill them in on what actually occurred.

The Manhattan district attorney’s office rushed to judgment May 14 and on the following days. Strauss-Kahn was removed from an airplane, subjected to the deliberately humiliating “perp walk,” incarcerated at Riker’s Island Jail and denied bail, at the strenuous insistence of the office of district attorney Cyrus Vance Jr.

Vance and his associates rapidly and very publicly charged Strauss-Kahn with two counts of Criminal Sexual Act in the First Degree, one count of Attempted Rape in the First Degree, one count of Sexual Abuse in the First Degree, one count of Unlawful Imprisonment in the Second Degree, one count of Forcible Touching, and one count of Sexual Abuse

in the Third Degree. The most serious charge alone, Criminal Sexual Act in the First Degree, a class B violent Felony, carried with it a maximum sentence of 25 years in prison. Vance said the prosecutors’ case “was strong ... very strong,” and the alleged victim was credible.

Far from rallying to Strauss-Kahn’s side, as the ISO suggests, the New York and US media had a field day at his expense, sparing no effort to discredit him in the public mind. He was tried and convicted in the press. That he was French and nominally a “socialist” played no small part in the campaign, as subtext or otherwise.

Would D’Amelio and Tylim care for some examples? Take these *New York Post* headlines from May: “IMF chief was warned to watch his behavior in the US,” “Latest gal: Lecher [Strauss-Kahn] kept begging to sleep with me,” “Whiny IMF head finally agrees to medical exam; set for arraignment today,” “Shame of Strauss-Kahn goes beyond sex,” “What do you expect from sleazy socialists?” (a *Post* letters column).

Or from CNN in May and early June: “Biographer: Strauss-Kahn a ‘great seducer,’” “Sex assault charge a warning to the ‘entitled,’” “Luxury New York hotels to give ‘panic buttons’ to maids,” “In IMF sex case, a sign of progress [i.e., that Strauss-Kahn was arrested],” “Sex, press and politics in France,” “Residing on Riker’s Island.”

This filthy effort was led by the *New York Times*, one of the leading voices of the American establishment. On May 17, as the WSWS noted at the time, the *Times* 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.’”

Dowd’s repugnant article, “Powerful and Primitive,” began: “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.”

In light of this material—and if the ISO authors would care to see more, dozens and dozens of similar pieces can be provided—what is one to make of *Socialist Worker*’s claim that “While the incident itself lasted only nine minutes by Diallo’s account, what followed was months of continual attacks on the victim by the media and every branch of the ‘justice’ system” and “predictably, almost all of the public scrutiny has been directed at Nafissatou Diallo, who has essentially been put on trial for her own rape”? Frankly, this is a fantasy and an attempt to deceive the reader.

The last comment is especially ludicrous, in light of the fact that well before the identity of the alleged victim became public, the global media was full of lurid stories about Strauss-Kahn’s alleged past improprieties, which D’Amelio and Tylim are only too eager to pass on once again. If

“almost all of the public scrutiny” has been directed at Diallo, how were our authors able to get hold of this material, which takes up 20 percent of their article?

Their own obvious double standard doesn't seem to occur to them. Thus they can write, “Regardless of Diallo's past, though, her story has remained ... that she was the victim of a sexual assault,” but later, “You might think, given the long list of charges against Strauss-Kahn, that Diallo's accusation, coupled with the strong physical evidence, would at least merit a trial.” In other words, Diallo's past and her pattern of lying, set out by the Manhattan district attorney in some detail (“False Account of a Rape,” “False Statements Under Oath,” “Additional Falsehoods”), has no bearing on the case, but unsubstantiated rumors about Strauss-Kahn, not “charges,” he has never been convicted of any crime, should help make sure that he goes to trial! And why, one might ask, is it the case, as D'Amelio and Tylim argue, that “Strauss-Kahn's past seems more relevant than Diallo's”?

As the case essentially fell apart in July, the tone of the media changed, in line with the efforts by the Manhattan district attorney and the political and media establishment to save face. In any event, as far as Strauss-Kahn's reputation and political ambitions went, the damage had already been done.

The ISO exhibits not the slightest interest in the issues of democratic rights. That phrase does not appear in the article, nor does “presumption of innocence,” “constitutional,” or “perp walk.” Any objective individual, putting aside the identity of the accused, would clearly view this as a highly problematic case. Not *Socialist Worker*.

Nor do our authors demonstrate any concern about the fact that the principal practical results of the charges brought against Strauss-Kahn were his forced resignation, above all under pressure from the Obama administration, from the directorship of the IMF and his ouster from the race for the French presidency in 2012, not inconsequential outcomes.

Might there not be something to consider here? Strauss-Kahn is a bourgeois political figure—after overcoming a youthful bout of “leftism,” he became an ardent and wealthy defender of the capitalist system. Is that the end of the story? Are there no divisions in the ruling elite? We know that the Republicans and Democrats both uphold the profit system, yet their differences are real and bitter. Much more so the conflicts within the global ruling elite.

D'Amelio and Tylim note that Strauss-Kahn was “one of the world's most powerful men,” but it doesn't seem to occur to them that he might have equally “powerful” political enemies, including on Wall Street and in Washington, and in Paris. Their trusting attitude toward such circles is astonishing. Do they really think that prosecutors in the district attorney's office did not discuss among themselves, and most probably with those high up in the US government, who they were dealing with?

Our authors ask, “Or are we supposed to believe that this was part of a premeditated plot by Diallo to make money by taking on one of the world's most powerful men?” They suggest that “Far-fetched doesn't begin to describe” this and other possible scenarios.

This is an article composed in political Wonderland. No one knows whether there was “a premeditated plot” of any kind, or whether the event merely provided Strauss-Kahn's opponents, for example, with a welcome opportunity, but the fact remains that he was forced out at the IMF, having received no support from the Sarkozy government, and replaced by an even more right-wing figure, Christine Lagarde, with closer historical ties to US big business. Policy changes at the IMF could affect the lives of millions. Moreover, at the time of his arrest he was leading in the polls as a potential French presidential candidate against Sarkozy and neo-fascist Marine Le Pen.

Socialist Worker brings up the allegations of Tristane Banon, the 32-year-old French writer who now claims that Strauss-Kahn tried to rape her in 2003, without mentioning what *Newsweek* magazine managed to

point out, that Banon's mother, Anne Mansouret, who urged her daughter to pursue the issue, “is an ambitious politician in her own right who is often identified with Strauss-Kahn's rivals in the French Socialist Party.”

D'Amelio and Tylim indicate no disquiet whatsoever over any of this. It is irresponsible in the extreme, in our opinion, to *assume* that the downfall of one of the world's most powerful political figures had nothing to do with politics. Frankly, the ordinary person in the street would be more suspicious and skeptical about the whole business than our ISO authors claim to be.

As for Diallo's interest in making money out of the case, why is this “farfetched,” considering that this is precisely what she is currently attempting to do, having filed a civil suit in August?

The argument seems to boil down to this: Diallo is black and female, Strauss-Kahn is white and male, so she should be believed, despite any contradictory evidence, and he should go to trial and, with any luck, to prison.

This barren method, which may please the ISO and some of its supporters, precludes arriving at an accurate picture of a complex world or a serious political perspective, and leads off into rotten political territory.

That many rapes go unreported or unpunished and that the rich and powerful get away with monstrous crimes on this planet are undeniable. But that is not an argument for convicting any individual, even the richest and most powerful, on flimsy or non-existent grounds. That only strengthens the repressive apparatus of the state and delivers another blow to what remain of elementary democratic rights.

Even if the *Socialist Worker* authors were merely animated by the desire to redress past wrongs done to the oppressed (and, frankly, they are not), such an attitude would have nothing in common with a class-conscious, socialist outlook.

The struggle to overthrow the existing order is not directed toward exacting vengeance, but placing society on a rational, humane, democratically organized basis. We do not view even the most criminal and predatory figures as creatures with horns, but as representatives and products of definite social interests. We are not out to punish them, first and foremost, but to do away with the conditions under which they hold sway.

It never seems to occur to D'Amelio and Tylim either that such sexual provocations could be organized against those they approve of. Have they ever heard of an individual named Julian Assange, an opponent of US imperialist policy, currently fighting against the attempt to extradite him to Sweden where trumped up sexual assault charges await him?

Would the ISO have thought it worthwhile to defend Alfred Dreyfus, an army officer, whose case became a political watershed in modern French history, described by one commentator as “rich, conservative and conventional”?

Their cheap and fraudulent populism has a long and unsavory history in the US. Are they familiar with the case of Leo Frank, a Jewish factory manager, wrongly accused of raping and murdering a working girl in 1915, and later lynched? Reactionary forces denounced Frank's “rich connections” and accused him of horribly abusing “a daughter of the people,” the “little factory girl who held to her innocence,” etc.

People who promote this kind of argument are playing a sinister game. Malicious references to “high-priced lawyers” suggest that it was impermissible for Strauss-Kahn to defend himself against charges which threatened to see him locked in prison for decades. Was he entitled to a defense at all? Is Diallo's story beyond questioning?

Let us ask: if such charges were leveled against a leading member of the ISO, would its members simply line up with an accuser of the appropriate gender and ethnicity? This is an invitation to a provocation. Such people are incapable of defending anything, they are politically dangerous.

In its brief on Diallo's behalf, the ISO piece relies heavily on an August 23 article by William Saletan in *Slate*, which D'Amelio and Tylim

describe as “an exposé” of the “case against Diallo.” It is no such thing. Saletan, who previously accused the prosecution of going overboard against Strauss-Kahn, now argues that the district attorney’s August 22 brief seeking dismissal of the charges exaggerates Diallo’s wrongdoings.

D’Amelio and Tylim fail to note Saletan’s previous position, which directly contradicts their own. He wrote in July that the collapse of the Strauss-Kahn case was not “a defeat for women or the justice system. It’s a victory for the power of corroboration.” In any event, Saletan now raises a number of issues about the DA’s brief, which may or may not be legitimate, but don’t call into question these essential facts: that Diallo gave different versions of the events of May 14, that she lied about the gang rape in Guinea, that she had tens of thousands of dollars (whether it was \$60,000 or \$100,000 hardly alters the essential fact) when she claimed to be deriving income only from housekeeping at the Sofitel hotel (she also had five cellphone accounts), and that she discussed the status of the case, and Strauss-Kahn’s wealth and prominence, with her incarcerated, drug dealer boy-friend in a cellphone call.

In any event, Saletan, along with *Socialist Worker*, leaves out of account the social and legal context. The DA’s office contended it had a “very strong” case, it brought charges with great fanfare, backed to the hilt by the American media and, tacitly, the Obama administration (Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner strongly suggested that Strauss-Kahn should step down from the IMF within days of his arrest in New York).

For what reason would prosecutors step away from the case, which promised to make careers, other than the fact that they found that their alleged victim’s “credibility cannot withstand the most basic evaluation,” and that “In virtually every substantive interview with prosecutors, despite entreaties to simply be truthful, she has not been truthful, on matters great and small, many pertaining to her background and some relating to the circumstances of the incident itself”? This was a humiliating climbdown and a fiasco for district attorney Vance. Their problem was, the work they did after the indictment was what they should have done before it.

The World Socialist Web Site has stood out against the media hysteria aimed at Strauss-Kahn, not because we share any sympathy for his views or position, but for principled reasons. For this, we come under attack from the ISO. D’Amelio and Tylim write that “those on the left ought to stand against the idea that one of the most powerful men in the world, with the help of a high-priced team of lawyers and PR specialists, should be allowed to use his power to twist what his accuser said.

“Disgracefully, some leftists don’t seem to agree. The World Socialist Web Site, for example, appeared to buy the slander against Diallo, hook, line and sinker. In a number of online articles, the website actually defended the former head of the IMF against an African immigrant hotel attendant, cheering on the dismissal of charges as if it signified some sort of victory for ordinary people.”

It is not clear what the first sentence even means, since neither Strauss-Kahn nor his lawyers had any power to twist Diallo’s words. They had little to do with uncovering her lies and the collapse of the case. We didn’t “buy the slander” against Diallo; unlike the ISO, we looked objectively at the facts and context of the case. We didn’t go along, as they did, with an anti-democratic smear job and witch-hunt. We didn’t forget that this was an action with all the power of the American state behind it.

The ISO is prevented from looking honestly at the Diallo-Strauss-Kahn affair by its class makeup and political orientation. Even if its members and supporters desired to look critically at the case, they would have to call themselves up short with this consideration: that a failure to support Diallo uncritically and unquestioningly would cut across their relations with feminists and other practitioners of middle class protest politics, as well as black petty bourgeois elements in and around the Democratic Party, who rallied enthusiastically for Diallo at a prominent Brooklyn church in late July.

What further proof does one need, after the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, after the removals most recently of Eliot Spitzer and Anthony Weiner from prominent political office, that sex scandals are continuously being used to influence American politics, and to drive it farther to the right?

The ISO approach is deeply subjective. Their addiction to identity politics and orientation to unstable middle class circles renders them susceptible to manipulation by reactionary forces. The ruling elite understands that publications such as *Socialist Worker* and others can be relied upon to provide a pseudo-left cover for its dirty operations. The ISO can be swung around on almost anything, in almost any direction.

Its constituencies will be satisfied with the ISO for the D’Amelio-Tylim piece, but the truth and the defense of democratic rights suffer.



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