In latest “human rights” crusade, NY Times’ Kristof promotes allegations against Woody Allen

David Walsh
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The alliance of self-satisfied media pundits, “human rights” activists, pseudo-lefts, feminists and openly right-wing elements, which periodically inundates the US with its moralizing in the service of political reaction, is at it again. This noxious overflow is as predictable as the annual flooding of the Nile.

The latest occasion for outrage and indignation is the open letter from Dylan Farrow accusing her stepfather, film director Woody Allen, of sexual abuse some two decades ago. The letter was publicized and promoted by Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times* in his February 1 column.

First of all, we should point out that Allen represents something in post-war American culture. From his days as a comedy writer for US television in the 1950s and his career as a stand-up comic in the 1960s (polls rank him as one of the top ten such comics in history) to his filmmaking career from the 1970s onward, Allen has earned a significant place in the popular culture. Some of his routines and gags have entered into the American comic canon, and deservedly so.

His body of work as a filmmaker is highly uneven, and in this critic’s view his best writing-directing work is long past. Nonetheless, early works like *What’s New Pussycat?* (which Allen wrote) and *What’s Up, Tiger Lily* still amuse, and *Annie Hall*, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* and *Husbands and Wives* stand up as more serious pieces, while there are undoubtedly either insightful or delightful moments, or both, in films such as *Manhattan*, *Stardust Memories*, *Zelig*, *Broadway Danny Rose*, *Alice*, *Mighty Aphrodite*, *Celebrity* and others.

Allen, now 78, was honored at the Golden Globes ceremony in December with the Cecil B. DeMille lifetime achievement award and is in the running for additional awards for his latest film, *Blue Jasmine*, at the 2014 Academy Awards. He has a devoted following, which is based on his generally sympathetic persona and his humane, tolerant view of life and people.

All of this makes him a fitting target to be “taken down” in a filthy campaign on the part of the especially reprehensible Kristof.

The *Times* columnist has emerged over the past decade as one of the most strident advocates of “human rights” imperialism, having urged US military intervention in Sudan (Darfur), Libya and Syria, all areas where the American ruling elite’s energy and geopolitical interests are at stake. On August 31, 2011, for example, Kristof wrote, from Tripoli, that, “Libya is a reminder that sometimes it is possible to use military tools to advance humanitarian causes.” The *Times* journalist is also on record as a defender of Asian sweatshops and a supporter of education “reform” in the US, i.e., the assault on public schools and teachers’ wages and benefits.

Mia Farrow, Allen’s highly estranged and highly vindictive former lover, who adopted Dylan with the director, has been involved—with other celebrities—in the Darfur intervention campaign.

Kristof’s piece on Dylan Farrow’s open letter is nauseating and unprincipled. After acknowledging that “Allen’s defenders correctly note that he denies the allegations, has never been convicted and should be presumed innocent,” and that he [Kristof] is a personal friend of Farrow’s, the *Times* columnist proceeds to treat the young woman’s accusations as the gospel truth.

He writes that Dylan Farrow “tells me that she has been traumatized for more than two decades by what *took place*; last year, she was belatedly diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. She says that when she heard of the [2013] Golden Globe award [for “outstanding contributions to the world of entertainment”] being given to Allen she curled up in a ball on her bed, crying hysterically.” [Emphasis added].

Excuse us, Mr. Kristof, but you are talking about what Dylan and Mia Farrow *allege* took place!

Kristof cites a conversation with Dylan Farrow, who told him, “‘To me, it’s black and white, because I was there.’ I asked her why she’s speaking out now. She said she wants to set the record straight and give courage to victims.”

Again, Kristof uses the phrase “to set the record straight” without qualification.

The column goes on: “Look, none of us can be certain what happened.”

At this point, of course, Kristof, if he had any sense of decency, would have shut his mouth. If he doesn’t know what happened, why is he holding forth on the case?

But he goes on: “The standard to send someone to prison is guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, but shouldn’t the standard to honor someone be that they are unimpeachably, well, honorable?”

Honor! Who is Kristof—who recently demanded a missile strike on Syrian targets, observing that “the cost of 100 missiles would [only] be about $70 million”—to make such judgments? Why should Woody Allen answer to this pro-militarist stooge? Kristof’s conception of “honor” is not one that any genuinely honorable human being would subscribe to.

“Yet the Golden Globes sided with Allen,” continues Kristof, “in effect accusing Dylan either of lying or of not mattering. That’s the message that celebrities in film, music and sports too often send to abuse victims.”

Allen, it should be pointed out, has not only not been convicted, he

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was never even charged with any crime.

Kristof's argumentation is incredible, almost unhinged.

No one can be sure what did or did not take place. Allen denies the allegations (as recently as Tuesday, in response to the Kristof column and Dylan Farrow's letter). There is no physical or psychological evidence. A police-appointed medical team concluded that Dylan "was not molested" after an investigation in 1993.

Dr John M. Leventhal, who headed the team and interviewed Dylan Farrow nine times, declared in a sworn statement, "We had two hypotheses: one, that these were statements that were made by an emotionally disturbed child [Dylan, seven at the time] and then became fixed in her mind. And the other hypothesis was that she was coached or influenced by her mother [Mia Farrow]. We did not come to a firm conclusion. We think that it was probably a combination."

Yet Kristof uses his column, a powerful tool, to give credence to the unproven and unsubstantiated allegations on behalf of a friend and fellow political campaigner. That this is a serious violation of elementary journalistic ethics has occurred not only to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

A reader of the *Times*, Chris Rasmussen, associate professor at Fairleigh Dickinson University, who presents himself as an admirer of Kristof, wrote to the newspaper's public editor, Margaret Sullivan, "to ask about the propriety of publishing largely one-sided columns assailing a lone individual."

Rasmussen continued: "The writers who are permitted to 'columnize' for The *Times* have a tremendously influential platform, and I wonder whether they should use that platform to advocate on behalf of personal friends, as Mr. Kristof did yesterday. If Dylan Farrow wishes to publish an open letter about her allegations, there are ample forums in this internet age. Should *The Times* and Mr. Kristof lend their credibility to her argument against Woody Allen?"

In response, Sullivan indicated that she was "troubled by the same questions."

The circles in which Kristof travels—wealthy, complacent and devoted to American free enterprise at any cost—have complete contempt for democratic principles. The presumption of innocence means nothing to such people. They treat it as an inconvenience or an afterthought, if they treat it at all.

One of the most repugnant hysterics in this crowd is the *Nation*'s Jessica Valenti. Her column on the Allen-Farrow question has an irrationalist character. It begins: "I've never watched a Woody Allen movie. My parents refused to rent them after he began a 'relationship' with Soon-Yi Previn and their explanation stuck with me through adulthood… My parents sat me down and talked about the responsibility adults have to children, and certain boundaries that parents and parental figures must respect."

For the record, Allen began his relationship with Soon-Yi Previn (they remain married), who was not his adopted daughter and in whose mother's apartment he never spent a single night, when she was 19 or 20.

Valenti carries on: "Today, as an adult, I know that when we make excuses for particular, powerful men who hurt women, we make the world more comfortable for all abusers. And that this cultural cognitive dissonance around sexual assault and abuse is building a safety net for perpetrators that we should all be ashamed of."

What proof does Valenti offer that Allen "hurt women?"

From the general propositions that many children are sexually assaulted, that "abusers are manipulative, often charismatic, and that they hide their crimes well," and that we are in the midst of an "epidemic of sexual violence," the *Nation* columnist brilliantly deduces Allen's guilt.

She writes: "Because no matter how much we know to be true, patriarchy pushes us to put aside our good judgment—particularly when that good judgment is urging us to believe bad things about talented, white men." Along the same lines, she writes at one point, "It's easier to ignore what we know to be true, and focus on what we wish was."

How does Valenti "know" it to be true in the absence of any legal evidence whatsoever? This is deeply foul, polluted thinking.

Numerous individuals who commented at the end of Valenti's article were hostile to her anti-democratic stance. One *Nation* reader, Laurie Wilson, observed, "I do not know what Jessica Valenti's background is, or what expertise or knowledge she brings to the table. But I can be sure of one thing: based on this article, she seems to have little or no understanding of the basic, bedrock constitutional principle of innocent until proven guilty. She's not alone in that, of course. The onslaught of lynch mob-like venomous assumption has begun. But shame on her for participating in it."

Larger questions than the alleged mistreatment of Dylan Farrow are involved. The same social elements—infected with gender politics and a postmodern lack of interest in historical and social fact—who leap to the witch-hunt against Allen and others have a long record by now of advocating imperialist war on the basis of unproven allegations.

For more than twenty years now, one wave after another of former radicals and liberals has signed up for Western intervention in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Darfur, Haiti, Mali, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Libya, Syria and elsewhere to forestall "genocide," avert "mass atrocities," block the use of "weapons of mass destruction" or "chemical weapons," stop the spread of "Islamo-fascism," bring "democracy" and "stability" to various global flashpoints, and so forth. These social forces, whose task is to confuse and benumb the population with arguments that falsely make use of "left" terminology and phrases, have become prominent mouthpieces for imperialist policy.

The Kristof column has inevitably unleashed the most backward and filthy elements, baying for Allen's blood, condemning "liberal Hollywood perverts" (or, under their breath in some cases, "liberal Jewish Hollywood perverts") and denouncing anyone who suggests an elementary concern for constitutional norms. Veteran television journalist Barbara Walters sparked "Twitter outrage" when she defended Allen on the television talk show "The View."

Genuine political health and wisdom begin in the US and internationally at present by separating and demarcating oneself as firmly and distinctly as possible from the phony "human rights" campaigners, the feminist moralizers and the pro-imperialist "left."

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