

Film director Roman Polanski questioned, released in Poland

David Walsh
3 November 2014

At the request of US authorities, veteran filmmaker Roman Polanski (*Rosemary's Baby*, *Chinatown*, *The Pianist*) was questioned by Polish prosecutors in Krakow last week, but later released.

The American government effort is the latest episode in a campaign to return the director to the US based on his having pled guilty in 1977 to having sex with an underage girl. Polanski fled the US in February 1978 upon learning that the judge in the case was planning to renege on a plea agreement and sentence him to decades in prison.

In 2009, American officials prevailed upon the Swiss government to arrest Polanski, a French-Polish citizen, in Zurich and applied for his extradition. After nearly 10 months, much of which Polanski spent under house arrest, the Swiss rejected the US request.

Polanski was in Poland to take part in events surrounding the formal opening of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. The filmmaker was born to a Polish Jewish father and a Russian half-Jewish mother in Paris in 1933. The family returned to Krakow in 1936. Much of Polanski's family perished in the Holocaust, including his mother and his favorite uncle.

US officials reportedly contacted the Polish attorney general's office last week and asked that Polanski, who has visited Poland several times in recent years, be detained so that extradition proceedings could be set in motion. A Polish Justice Ministry official told the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily that the US petition was rejected because it was not submitted in Polish.

"This was not a request for extradition, but for [Polanski's] detention, so that extradition proceedings can be initiated," the official explained. "For the time being, we won't do anything, as the petition did not meet formal requirements. It is not translated into

Polish, and that is required by international agreements.

"It will come to nothing, because the document will be amended, and in the meantime, Polanski will return to France—until next time."

Jan Olszewski, one of Polanski's attorneys, told CNN affiliate TVN24, "[The matter] was not sent to the court that could impose a temporary arrest because the prosecution did not find basis for that."

Polish Justice Ministry spokesman Mateusz Martyniuk told the media Thursday that Polanski "said he would comply with all requests made by prosecutors in this case and provided his address. Prosecutors therefore decided not to arrest him in connection with a possible US extradition request." Martyniuk still held out the possibility of Polanski's being extradited because "the statute of limitations does not apply to US requests."

In 2010, the Polish prosecutor indicated that the director could not be handed over to US officials because under Polish law too much time had passed since the offense.

Polanski told TVN24 that he believed his Polish lawyers would soon have the case—presumably referring to the possibility of his being extradited from Poland—closed "once and for all." He told the media that he would be in Poland in February and March 2015 to work on a new film about the Dreyfus case, the infamous anti-Semitic witch-hunt in France in the 1890s. Polanski also indicated he wanted to show the country to his young children, who have not been there since they were very young and "as a result don't know my motherland."

The latest attempt by US authorities to extradite Polanski, whether or not they thought it had a chance of succeeding, is reactionary and vindictive. A government recently accused in a submission to the UN

Committee Against Torture of authorizing and implementing “a sophisticated, international criminal program of torture” has the audacity to treat the 81-year-old filmmaker like a major criminal.

One of the aims of campaigns such as that against Polanski, which instantly generate inflammatory coverage in the media, is to divert public attention away from the social crisis within the United States and the endless wars waged by the US government.

In 1977, the filmmaker pled guilty to one charge of engaging in unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor, with the expectation that he would be put on probation at the final sentencing. As part of a plea agreement, Polanski spent 42 days in a California state prison undergoing psychiatric evaluation.

Probation officers recommended against further jailing, noting that the victim and her parent, as well as an examining psychiatrist, made the same recommendation. However, Judge Laurence J. Rittenband, in an act of brazen judicial misconduct in response, in part, to pressures from right-wing “law and order” elements, indicated that far more jail time and possible deportation were in order, prompting Polanski to flee.

In contrast to the authorities, the victim herself, Samantha Geimer (then Gailey), continues to demonstrate an elemental humanity and democratic sensibility. In her 2013 memoir, *The Girl: A Life in the Shadow of Roman Polanski*, Geimer cites her lawyer Larry Silver’s assertion following Polanski’s arrest in 2009—obviously conveying her own sentiment—that she continued to suffer “because a corrupt judge caused, understandably, Polanski to flee. No matter what his crime, Polanski was entitled to be treated fairly; he was not. The day Polanski fled was a sad day for American justice. Samantha should not be made to pay the price. She has been paying for a failed judicial and prosecutorial system.”

In October 2010, Geimer told talk show host Larry King that she had been “more damaged by the court system and the media” than by Polanski.

Polanski’s brief detention in Poland last week inevitably brought out the baying hounds—the sordid coalition of ultra-right media figures, upper-middle class feminists and others—that coalesced in 2009. In Britain’s *Independent*, Alice Jones headlined her piece, “It’s time to say no to Roman Polanski, the on-the-run

paedophile.” Terrence McCoy’s scurrilous article in the *Washington Post* was entitled, “Why Roman Polanski may never be brought to justice for raping a child.”

It is especially obscene that Polanski, on the insistence of US authorities, was detained in Krakow, the city where he spent much of his childhood and where his family was trapped behind barbed wire in the Jewish ghetto established by the occupying German forces in 1941. Over the course of the following two years, the ghetto population was decimated, many deported to Germany for slave labor or sent to the extermination camp at Auschwitz, only thirty miles west of Krakow.

In his autobiography, *Roman by Polanski*, the director recounts how his mother took him to stay temporarily with a non-Jewish family in February 1943 after warnings of a new German raid: “When the time came for me to go back, it was my father, not my mother, who collected me on his way from the factory in town where he was employed as a metalworker. He had bribed a guard to let him quit work early and was returning to the ghetto without his armband... [H]e hugged and kissed me with surprising intensity. As we were walking back across the Padgorze bridge toward the ghetto, he started weeping uncontrollably. At last he said, ‘They took your mother.’”

Polanski’s mother, four months pregnant, was transported directly to Auschwitz where she was murdered. His father survived the Mauthausen concentration camp in Upper Austria, “among the harshest outposts of a penal system known for its barbarism,” comments a Polanski biographer.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact