The hypocritical, cowardly expulsion of Roman Polanski from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

1977 victim Samantha Geimer: It's "an ugly and cruel action"

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The decision May 1 by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), the industry body that hands out the Oscars, to expel French-Polish filmmaker Roman Polanski is hypocritical and cowardly. This is the latest atrocity attributable to the sexual witch hunt launched last October.

In 1977, Polanski pled guilty to unlawful sex with a minor, 13-year-old Samantha Gailey (now Geimer). He spent 42 days in prison undergoing psychiatric examination. Under the terms of the plea agreement, it was expected by both defense and prosecution that the director would receive probation. He fled the US when a vindictive judge, guilty of gross misconduct in the case, threatened to renege on the agreement and sentence Polanski to a lengthy jail term.

The Academy announced that it was expelling Polanski, along with actor and comic Bill Cosby, "in accordance with the organization's Standards of Conduct… The Board continues to encourage ethical standards that require members to uphold the Academy's values of respect for human dignity."

What a filthy business. The august, pretentiously named "Academy" was founded by producer Louis B. Mayer in 1927 as nothing more than a "company union," in the words of various historians, aimed at crushing support for genuine labor organizing and defusing political radicalism in Hollywood.

Later, it played a decisive role in spearheading the anticommunist witch hunt and purges of the 1940s and 1950s. Among other actions, the Academy passed a special bylaw making it impossible for those refusing to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to receive an Oscar, only rescinding the disgraceful measure in the late 1950s.

In a notoriously ruthless and dishonest industry, the Academy has never censured or expelled anyone for stealing or corruption, much less exploiting the labor force. It has not once kicked out a member for cooperating with government witch-hunters, the US military or the CIA. However, the moral guardians of AMPAS have drawn the line with Polanski, one of the better filmmakers of his generation, in accordance with "the Academy's values of respect for human dignity." This is a little like spying a placard on the wall of a brothel, "Hygiene is our only concern."

Harland Braun, Polanski's lawyer, announced the director would appeal the decision. According to *Vanity Fair*, "We want due process," Braun said. "That's not asking too much of the Academy, is it? … Mr. Polanski was supposed to be given notice, and have 10 days to present his side… It was a complete debacle in the sense that they didn't follow their own rules." The magazine continued, "Braun said he had heard the Academy was planning to take up the issue of Polanski's membership, and he was prepared to make a presentation to the board, which would include statements from the victim in his 1977 case, Samantha Geimer." The AMPAS board obviously preferred not to hear reasoned arguments against its precipitous and unfair action.

In fact, the 55-year-old Geimer had the best response to the Academy decision, calling it "an ugly and cruel action which serves only appearance… It does nothing to change the sexist culture in Hollywood today and simply proves that they will eat their own to survive. I say to Roman, good riddance to bad rubbish, the Academy has no true honor, it's all just P.R." Geimer then referred succinctly to the Academy as "a bunch of douchebags."

Polanski, 84 years old, has made a number of important films during his career, including *Knife in the Water*, *Cul-de-Sac*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Macbeth*, *Chinatown*, *The Tenant*, *Tess* and *The Pianist*. He is one of the more honest chroniclers of the traumas of the mid-twentieth century, and he comes by that ability through bitter experience.

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As a child in 1942-43, Polanski witnessed the deportation of Krakow's Jewish population to concentration camps and barely escaped that fate himself. His father survived a camp, his mother died in Auschwitz. Many years later, Polanski's pregnant wife, actress Sharon Tate, was murdered in August 1969 at the couple's home in Los Angeles by members of the Manson Family (the director was in Europe at the time).

Polanski or his films have won every major industry and festival award, including the Berlin Film Festival Silver Bear, an Academy Award, a Golden Globe, numerous BAFTA [British Academy of Film and Television Arts] and César [bestowed by France's Academy of Cinema Arts and Techniques] awards, the Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or and many more.

The renewed campaign against Polanski by US and Los Angeles authorities, initiated in 2009 when he was arrested in Switzerland and threatened with deportation to the US, has always had a vindictive, politically malicious character.

As the WSWS noted at the time: "The effort to vilify film director Roman Polanski, now imprisoned in Switzerland, and have him extradited to the United States has become the rallying point for a broader campaign against 'Hollywood liberals,' intellectuals, artists, and non-conformists of all sorts. Behind the demands that 'justice must be done' and 'no one is above the law' lies a reactionary social and ideological agenda… A coalition of right-wingers and 'feminist liberals' has formed, capable of the wildest demagogy and accusations." This alliance, only in its budding stage in 2009, has fully flowered in the course of the #MeToo campaign.

The decision by the AMPAS Board of Governors to expel Polanski, who has remained a member for the forty years since his 1977 guilty plea, is a capitulation to the #MeToo movement, the aggressive drive by a layer of affluent women in Hollywood for more privileges and power.

Polanski received an Academy Award fifteen years ago for *The Pianist*, in which regard the Associated Press noted, "the audience at the 2003 Oscars gave an absent Polanski a hearty standing ovation upon his win, [Harvey] Weinstein, Martin Scorsese and Meryl Streep among them. Nine years ago, when Polanski was arrested in Zurich and U.S. authorities attempted to extradite him, over 100 celebrities signed a petition for his release, including Woody Allen, Weinstein, Scorsese, Steven Soderbergh, Darren Aronofsky, Natalie Portman, David Lynch, Penelope Cruz and Tilda Swinton."

Nothing has changed. The persecution of Polanski remains politically motivated. But Hollywood liberalism has lurched further to the right, abandoning in large measure even a nominal commitment to democratic rights.

The Academy did not announce the results of the May 1 vote on Polanski's expulsion. The 55-member Board of Governors, among them three members from each of the 17 branches, includes actors Laura Dern (a #MeToo fanatic), Whoopi Goldberg and Tom Hanks, directors Michael Mann, Kimberly Peirce and Steven Spielberg, and producer Kathleen Kennedy, the president of LucasFilm. Kennedy proposed last October the establishment of a "commission" to investigate and take action against sexual harassment, a type of House Un-American Sexual Activities Committee.

Samantha Geimer, as noted above, reflects the general, healthy opinion of that portion of the American population not obsessed with race and gender, i.e., its vast majority.

The cries for Polanski's blood continue to be forthcoming, however, from a certain deplorable social type, the upper middle class moralists of the *New York Times* and *Guardian* variety. This is the crowd that has no difficulty with mass killings and devastation in Libya, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere, as long as it is done in the name of "human rights" or "women's rights," but sees red at the thought of Polanski escaping years behind bars.

Thus, we hear from columnist Barbara Ellen in the *Guardian* ("Those who deplored the persecution of Roman Polanski enabled the likes of Weinstein") in a McCarthyite piece, aimed at intimidating opposition to the sexual harassment campaign. Ellen writes, "Indeed, the straight line from what Polanski was allowed to get away with and, years later, what the likes of Weinstein thought they were allowed to do cannot be ignored. Those who gave Polanski any sympathy or support over his 'persecution' should probably also congratulate themselves on helping to embolden predatory entitled characters such as Weinstein. So, bravo to the Academy for belatedly crying 'cut' on Polanski."

What Geimer pungently called the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Board of Governors goes for the *Guardian* columnist as well.

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