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International Monetary Fund chief arrested on sexual assault charges

By Alex Lantier

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International Monetary Fund (IMF) head Dominique Strauss-Kahn was arrested early Sunday morning on charges of criminal sex acts, attempted rape, and unlawful imprisonment, after an alleged encounter with a chambermaid at a Sofitel hotel in New York City.

Strauss-Kahn was due to travel to Berlin to discuss the Greek bailout and European financial crises with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. He was also scheduled to speak to officials of France's Socialist Party (PS), France's main bourgeois "left" party, of which he is a high-ranking member. Strauss-Kahn was until yesterday seen as the PS's most likely candidate in the 2012 French presidential elections to challenge President Nicolas Sarkozy.

According to a 32-year-old Sofitel employee, however, Strauss-Kahn assaulted her at 1 p.m. on Saturday, after she entered his \$3,000-a-night suite to clean it, not realizing he was still there. He allegedly emerged from the bathroom naked, chased her down a hallway, and sexually assaulted her after dragging her into a bedroom, though she was subsequently able to break free.

After the woman escaped, she notified other hotel staff, who called the New York Police Department (NYPD). According to US authorities, Strauss-Kahn then fled his hotel room, leaving his cell phone behind, but was detained by Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

police officers in the first class cabin of Air France Flight 23 at 4:40 p.m., ten minutes before the flight left for Paris.

The Sofitel employee was taken to Manhattan's Roosevelt Hospital to be treated for minor injuries. Jorge Tito, a manager at the Accor chain that owns Sofitel, issued a statement declaring, "We would like to point out that our employee worked at the Sofitel New York for three years and was completely satisfactory in terms of her work and behavior."

Strauss-Kahn was taken to the NYPD's Special Victims office and was arrested at 2:15 a.m. Sunday. Strauss-Kahn's attorney, Benjamin Brafman, said his client denied all charges and would plead not guilty.

Anne Sinclair—a former TV journalist who is Strauss-Kahn's third wife, and a multi-millionaire heiress to the fortune of art dealer Paul Rosenberg—released a brief statement saying that she had no doubt "that his innocence will be established." According to a report in *France-Soir*, she plans to investigate the Sofitel employee.

An IMF spokeswoman acknowledged Strauss-Kahn's arrest, adding that "the IMF remains fully functioning and operational." The IMF named former JP Morgan and US Treasury executive John Lipsky, the IMF number two official under Strauss-Kahn, as acting managing director.

Strauss-Kahn has faced repeated allegations of sexual improprieties in recent years, from both right-wing and PS sources. In 2007, journalist Tristane Banon alleged that he had sexually assaulted her years before, though she did not press charges amid fears that it might end her career. In 2008 PS deputy Aurélie Filipetti said that, after a "very blunt and insistent" proposal from Strauss-Kahn, "I arranged never to find myself alone with him in a closed location."

After Strauss-Kahn's 2008 affair with IMF employee and Hungarian economist Piroska Nagy came to light, an IMF investigation concluded that the relationship "reflected a serious error of judgment."

A minister in several Socialist Party governments, Strauss-Kahn personifies the organization's reactionary politics—a party of the financial aristocracy profoundly hostile to socialism and to the struggles of the working class. It underscores the profoundly dishonest, reactionary role of various "left" groups in France—such as the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) or Workers Struggle (LO)—who still present the PS as a socialist or "left" party.

Strauss-Kahn began in the 1970s as a member of the Union of Communist Students (UEC), the youth movement of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), while a student of statistics, economics, and law. In 1976 he joined the Socialist Party (PS), then a newly-formed electoral vehicle for François Mitterrand.

This was part of a broad movement as student ex-radicals, who were politicized after the 1968 student protests and general strike, and were recruited to form what would become the bourgeoisie's main political personnel in the 1980s, under Mitterrand's presidency.

Numerous figures from pseudo-“left” organizations also joined the PS at this time, rising to leading positions. These included (from the Revolutionary Communist League [LCR], now the New Anti-Capitalist Party) Pierre Moscovici, Julien Dray, and Henri Weber; from the Internationalist Communist Organization (OCI), today the Independent Workers Party, came Jean-Christophe Cambadélis and, most famously, future Prime Minister Lionel Jospin.

A PS legislator and policy specialist in the 1980s under Mitterrand, Strauss-Kahn served as a minister, then became a corporate lobbyist in the 1990s. As finance minister in the 1997-2002 Jospin “Plural Left” government, Strauss-Kahn privatized several public firms—France Télécom, Crédit Lyonnais bank, and defense firm Thomson-CSF. After resigning as minister in 1999 in a bribery scandal, he remained a major figure inside the PS and corporate circles, taking the IMF post after being nominated by Sarkozy in 2007.

As IMF chief, he has overseen deep social cuts impoverishing workers in many indebted countries—Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Hungary, Romania, and Pakistan—in exchange for IMF loans. He recently oversaw financial negotiations with the military dictatorship in Egypt, as it tries to combat the resistance of the working class following the departure of Hosni Mubarak.

Until recently Strauss-Kahn led in polls for France’s 2012 presidential election, due to mass hostility to the right-wing policies of Sarkozy. He had already faced criticisms, however, in the media over his lavish lifestyle. There are reports that he bought a \$30,000 suit in New York, and pictures of him appeared in the press stepping out of a Porsche reportedly owned by one of his top aides, Ramzi Khiroun.

French politicians expressed surprise and concern at the implications of the charges against Strauss-Kahn for the 2012 elections. The unpopular Sarkozy trails both Strauss-Kahn and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen in polls. PS Chairwoman Martine Aubry described Strauss-Kahn’s arrest as a “thunderbolt.”

Long-time PS official Jacques Attali warned that Strauss-Kahn “won’t be able to be a candidate for the Socialist Party presidential primary.”

Strauss-Kahn’s potential competitors for the PS nomination made cautious statements. Ségolène Royal asked the public to “wait for the courts to decide,” adding: “No one can profit from [Strauss-Kahn’s] difficulties.” Former PS chairman François Hollande, who has declared his intention to run, also warned against drawing “premature conclusions.”

An anonymous Sarkozy advisor told *Le Monde*: “If this had taken place 15 days from the election, it would have been the theatrical scandal that would have kept him from going until the end. Now, however, we are in a troubled period. Everything is changing; each week brings new events, not just small ones but cataclysms.”