

Hollywood divided in support for jailed director Polanski

Switzerland

David Charter Zurich
Chris Ayres Los Angeles

A backlash was growing last night against the actors and directors who leapt to the defence of Roman Polanski after his arrest on a child sex charge.

Celebrated cinema luminaries including Woody Allen, David Lynch and Martin Scorsese called for Polanski to be freed immediately from arrest in Switzerland on a US extradition warrant. He is wanted for fleeing 30 years ago to avoid sentencing after admitting unlawful sex with a 13-year-old girl in 1977. Lawyers for the film director have appealed for his release on bail.

Luc Besson, the director of *Léon*, however, refused to sign the Hollywood petition, saying that no one should be above the law, and Donald Tusk, the Polish Prime Minister, criticised his Foreign Minister for urging the director's freedom.

Polanski, 76, is said to have felt no qualms about visiting Zurich Film Festival to pick up a lifetime achievement award, partly because his lawyers believed that he was no longer actively being sought. He faces a wait of up to

two weeks to hear about bail, which legal sources said was unlikely.

"The case involves a great director but still it is also a case of... sex with a child," Mr Tusk said. "We should not bring politics into this or speak in patriotic tones."

Mr Tusk's warning followed an appeal by his Foreign Minister, Radek Sikorski, and Bernard Kouchner, the Foreign Minister of France, where

was unlawful and demanding his immediate release.

The Oscar-winning director of films including *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Pianist* faces several months in prison because the US has 60 days to send its formal extradition request and the appeal process is likely to last "some weeks", Swiss authorities said.

In Hollywood, Polanski's friends and admirers were as outraged that

the Los Angeles District Attorney still wanted to prosecute the 32-year-old case, not least because his victim said that she did not believe that he should be pursued.

The actress Whoopi Goldberg said: "I don't believe it was rape-rape. He went to jail and when they let him out he was like, 'You know what, this [judge] is going to give me a hundred years in jail. I'm not staying.'"



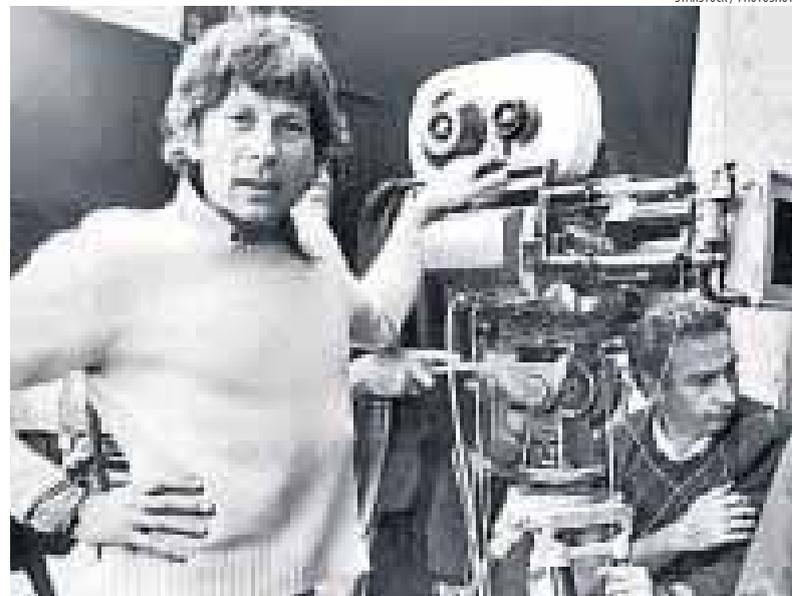
Woody Allen joined calls to free director

Polanski lives with his wife and two children.

The petition has been signed by more than 100 cinema industry figures. "We demand the immediate release of Roman Polanski," it stated. "Film-makers in France, in Europe, in the United States and around the world are dismayed by this decision."

The *Times* understands that Polanski's lawyers made claims on two grounds in Switzerland yesterday, arguing that the nature of his arrest

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Roman Polanski faces a wait of up to two weeks to hear about bail

I should have backed Hillary, says Gore Vidal

United States

Tim Teeman

Barack Obama is failing as President and the US is in danger of sliding into a military dictatorship, says Gore Vidal, the pre-eminent American essayist and intellectual.

In an exclusive interview with *The Times*, Vidal, 83, reveals that he regrets switching his allegiance from Hillary Clinton to Mr Obama during last year's campaign to secure the Democratic presidential nomination.

"I was hopeful," he said of Mr Obama. "He was the most intelligent person we've had in that position for a long time. But he's inexperienced. He has a total inability to understand military matters. He's acting as if Afghanistan is the magic talisman: solve that and you solve terrorism."

America should leave Afghanistan, Vidal said. "We've failed in every other aspect of our effort of conquering the Middle East or whatever you want to call it." The "War on Terror" was "made up, just like 'weapons of destruction'."

On Mr Obama's plan to reform healthcare, he said: "He f***** it up. I don't know how, because the country wanted it. We'll never see it happen."

America has no intellectual class and is rotting away at a funereal pace, he believes. "We'll have a military dictatorship soon, on the basis nobody else can hold everything together. Obama would have been better off focusing on educating the American people. His problem is being over-educated. He doesn't realise how dim-witted and ignorant his audience is."

Interview, *times2*, pages 34, 35

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