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Decades of systematic, serious sexual abuse by the former owner of the British luxury department store Harrods has come to public attention after the BBC released a documentary featuring the stories of more than 20 victims. Justice for Harrods survivors, a group of lawyers representing victims, have since said they now represent 60 alleged victims, with "more to come", and described the case as "global in scope" [1] [2].

Billionaire Mohamed al Fayed, who died in 2024 aged 94, has been accused of building a system of staff that enabled his serial rape, sexual assault and abuse of minors, despite attempts to cover it up.

His crimes spanned decades, with the first reported victim coming just a year after he bought Harrods in 1985, from a 16-year-old girl who started working at the department store in 1986 and said she was sexually abused from 1987, when she worked as Fayed's personal assistant, until 1991 [1].

Another victim, using the pseudonym "Kate", recounted her experience at her first job when she was raped by Fayed at the age of 16. Soon after getting the job, Fayed asked her questions about her sexual activity and "if she had a boyfriend". Fayed arranged for her to have a "company medical" with Dr Ann Coxon of Harley Street, which was sold to her as a company perk. Despite explaining that she hadn't been sexually active, she was forcibly tested for STDs and HIV. This information was then passed on to Fayed, who took Kate to a meeting where her "purity" was questioned [3].

One night Kate was called to his flat. She said she was "scared" but "knew I had no choice to say no". Fayed tried to pressure her into having sex with him, and when she said no, he became violent. With the doors locked and no way to escape, Fayed raped her [3].

Other workers have since come forward to describe a similar medical examination, naming the same two doctors, Dr Ann Coxon and Dr Wendy Snell. Some of the women were told that they had been 'bugged' to prevent them from talking to each other, and others reported being intimidated by Fayed's security staff [4].

In 1995, Vanity Fair published an article alleging racism, employee surveillance and sexual misconduct by Fayed against Harrods staff. In response, Fayed launched a libel suit that sparked a two-year investigation by Vanity Fair editor Henry Porter, which was closed "out of respect" by S.I. Newhouse, owner of Conde Nast, a mass media giant that owns Vanity Fair, after Fayed's son was killed in a car crash with Princess Diana [1].

Despite an ITV story in 1997 reporting serious allegations of sexual harassment and groping, subsequent police investigations produced no results. This is not surprising in the UK, where between April 2023 and March 2024, fewer than 3 in 100 reported rapes resulted in anyone being charged in the same year [5]. Less surprising is this fact when considering that Fayed was a well-known public figure, with connections to senior figures in Parliament, the Royalty and celebrities.

After Fayed's death in 2023, Harrods began settling claims with victims, acknowledging vicarious liability for his actions. Harrod's current owners have condemned Fayed's behaviour and apologised for the failure to protect victims

under his leadership.

Despite Harrods' new capitalist owners' condemnation of Fayed's crimes and their apologies to the former employees, they too are complicit in recreating the conditions that make such crimes possible. There are no "good" or "bad" capitalists. Capitalists exist in competition and require a class of working people who have no other means of subsistence than the sale of their ability to work. These new "apologetic" owners are complicit as they also require this class and enable and benefit from its oppression. The capitalist class, which exists in competition, must attract the largest market to ensure the reproduction of its profits, and the workers, who are caught up in the competition, are dragged into worsening conditions, forced to let the capitalists exploit them harder and harder, and in Fayed's case, sexually abuse them as well, in order to get by.

Following the BBC documentary, the Metropolitan Police have reopened their investigation into the allegations and are considering whether others should be prosecuted for offences related to Fayed's abuse. Capitalist law, despite its formal 'equality', protects the right of capitalists to private property and thus protects the system that creates the conditions for such abuse of workers in the first place.

This "monster" got away with horrendous crimes for decades without any repercussions, while living in absolute luxury and dying at the ripe old age of 94, with obituaries praising his life's "success" from the very same media outlets that have exposed his crimes [6].

The many workers he violently and systematically sexually abused did not receive the same treatment. These young workers were doubly exploited, both as wage labourers and essentially as forced sex slaves. After he was 'done' with them, the workers, left with lasting psychological damage, would be unlikely to have the time or money to seek help. The only "reward" they received was the pleasure of returning to work, only to be exploited by another capitalist in order to make ends meet.

Before the advent of private property, the natural division of labour placed women in positions of power. The gathering of food, the keeping of the hearth and, later, the embryonic forms of agriculture and animal husbandry were the responsibility of women. These forms of work were of far greater economic importance to the clan than hunting, which was the role of men. Of great importance was the fact that kinship was measured through the maternal line.

With the emergence of private property and class society, men took control of inheritance and matriarchy was overthrown. Patriarchy and the oppression of women have since dominated every epoch of class society, each with its own unique manifestations.

Capitalism has laid the basis for the working class to abolish private property and with it the last vestiges of patriarchy, replacing it with a planned economy that serves the needs of the working majority rather than the greed of a small capitalist minority, and a workers state that effectively guarantees women workers a life free from oppression rather than the security of capitalist profits and their subsequent ability to build predatory systems.

To do this, the working class must form its own independent party, guided by a scientific theory that represents its objective interests: Marxism-Leninism.

Sources:

[1] BBC News — ["Mohamed al Fayed: Timeline of Harrods sexual predator"](#) — September 23, 2024.

[2] ITV News — "Barristers say they are now representing 60 alleged Mohamed Al Fayed victims" — September 27, 2024.

[3] BBC News — "Mohamed Al Fayed: Woman says 'monster' raped her at 16" — September 26, 2024.

[4] BBC News — "Mohamed Al Fayed: How he built a corrupt system of enablers"— September 26, 2024.

[5] Rape Crisis — "Rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse statistics" — July, 2024.

[6] BBC News — "Obituary: Mohamed Al Fayed"— September 1, 2023.

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