

# Repressive political agenda of the “sexual harassment” campaign comes into the open

David Walsh  
28 November 2017

The torrent of allegations and denunciations of sexual misconduct against media figures, Hollywood personalities and politicians continues to flow unabated. The upper middle class in America seems obsessed with little else, except perhaps Vladimir Putin. Meanwhile the mass of the population in the US live their own lives, dominated by economic and social problems.

This campaign has nothing to do with protecting women—especially working-class women—against sexual harassment, let alone criminal violence and other forms of exploitation and repression. With each passing day, the reactionary, anti-democratic and socially and politically repressive political agenda of the current media-driven campaign is becoming increasingly explicit.

Anyone foolish or naïve enough to be roped in by it ought to be brought to their senses by some of the filth that is emerging, including the demented article by Stephen Marche in this Sunday’s *New York Times* on the brutality of the male libido, which states that self-castration may be one answer to the problem.

The sexual misconduct campaign began in the *Times* and *New Yorker* with the alleged misdeeds of Harvey Weinstein. Everyone could presumably be induced to dislike the fat Hollywood mogul. But this was simply part of the softening-up process, a means of catching people off guard.

The crusade has become an openly right-wing operation that gives off the ever more pronounced odor of reaction and repression. In some extraordinary manner, the goings-on in the entertainment industry are being transformed into a call for a restoration of tight controls on sexual activity.

In a remarkable *Washington Post* column, “Let’s rethink sex,” Christine Emba explains to her readers what she considers a common misunderstanding: “that there’s some baseline amount of sex that we should be getting or at least should be allowed to pursue. Following from that is the assumption that the ability to pursue and satisfy our sexual desires ... is paramount.”

Emba goes on to explain that since “the excesses of our current sexual ethic are coming up against their consequences, some uncomfortable readjustment will need to occur. Adjusting to this new understanding may well mean less sex for some, in the short term, and more anxiety for several. Too bad.” She concludes, “We won’t die of having less sex (indeed, no one ever has). Somehow, people will still find ways to meet, mate and propagate the species. If you are a decent person, the prospect of a clearer, more bounded sexual ethic should not frighten you.”

The argument that sexual repression “never killed anyone,” in fact that it might be a positive good, is worthy of Cotton Mather. Indeed, the latter New England Puritan minister advised youth and adults alike

to avoid sexual stimulation and to control the desires that “lie lurking in your heart.”

We might ask, who appointed Emba, former “Hilton Kramer Fellow in Criticism” at *The New Criterion*, one right-wing publication, and whose writing has appeared in the *National Review*, another one, the sexual *Gauleiter* of America? Why should anyone pay the slightest attention to her miserable moral prescriptions and definitions of “decency”? One can only assume that Emba has a stack of scarlet “A”s in her closet ready to be deployed as need be.

Where is this rubbish coming from? Out of this backwardness will appear—much to the surprise and dismay of some—efforts to outlaw all sorts of sexual activity, including extramarital sex, or “fornication” as Emba refers to it, gay marriage and other forms of sexuality disapproved of by the new Victorians.

Approaching matters from a slightly different angle, the Sunday *Times* column (“The Unexamined Brutality of the Male Libido”) by Marche, a Toronto-based writer well connected to the Canadian media and political establishment, is simply unhinged.

Marche refers to “the nature of men in general,” “the grotesquerie of their sexuality,” “the ugly and dangerous nature of the male libido,” “the implicit brutality of male sexuality” and cites the contention of the ultra-reactionary “radical feminist” Andrea Dworkin that “the only sex between a man and a woman that could be undertaken without violence was sex with a flaccid penis.” Marche goes on to invoke, approvingly by virtue of its context, the example of “the great [third century A.D.] Catholic theologian Origen,” who “castrated himself.”

From there, Marche proceeds to myth and fairy tale and their “fear of the male libido,” explaining that “A vampire is an ancient and powerful man with an insatiable hunger for young flesh,” and adding that “Werewolves are men who regularly lose control of their bestial nature.”

Implying that sex is a disease, Marche asserts that “there remains no cure for human desire.” What, then, should be done about it? Referencing Freud, he writes: “The idea of the Oedipus complex contained an implicit case for the requirements of strenuous repression: If you let boys be boys, they will murder their fathers and sleep with their mothers.”

There’s more. The “post-Weinstein era will be an era of gender pessimism,” because there may well be “no possible reconciliation between the bright clean ideals of gender equality and the mechanisms of human desire.” Arriving by a different route at the same destination as Emba, Marche proclaims triumphantly that “sexual morality, so long resisted by liberals, has returned with a vengeance,” and, with evident satisfaction, points out that “we are returning to shame as our

primary social form of sexual control.”

Marche concludes more or less with this: “If you want to be a civilized man, you have to consider what you are. Pretending to be something else, some fiction you would prefer to be, cannot help. It is not morality but culture—accepting our monstrosity, reckoning with it—that can save us.” This avowal brings to mind images of monks flagellating themselves and each other, immersion in ice-cold water and sundry forms of self-mutilation. Marche argues explicitly that the issue is the suppression of male libido.

Is his self-loathing a posture, designed to curry favor with the gender politics crowd, or is it genuine? Perhaps only Mr. Marche can answer this question. But whatever the answer, his sick and rotten ideas are being published in the *New York Times*. Only a deeply reactionary political agenda makes use of such polluted conceptions.

The contempt for democratic rights in the sexual harassment campaign comes out more and more clearly.

Increasingly, commentators flaunt their lack of concern about the innocence or guilt of those accused.

*Teen Vogue* columnist Emily Lindin explained on Twitter: “I’m actually not at all concerned about innocent men losing their jobs over false allegations of sexual assault or harassment” and, later, “If some innocent men’s reputations have to take a hit in the process of undoing the patriarchy, that is a price I am absolutely willing to pay.”

Olivia Goldhill headlined her piece at *Quartz*, “Naming abusers online may be ‘mob justice’ but it’s still justice.” Goldhill doesn’t seem to get the point of the phrase “mob justice,” i.e., that it is no justice at all.

In regard to protests against McCarthyite denunciations, Roxane Gay in the *New York Times* complained bitterly about “a lot of hand-wringing about libel and the ethics of anonymous disclosure.”

At Splinternews, Isha Aran suggested that “In light of the #MeToo social media campaign and the scores of women from all walks of life sharing their experiences with harassment and assault, to even bring up the concept of false accusations seems ill-timed and rude.”

Again, all of this comes out of a very affluent section of the population, which would like to leverage accounts of its supposedly tormenting circumstances into even greater wealth.

Decades of ideological and political reaction lie behind these reactionary notions, but also a good deal of envy.

As attorney and writer Jill Filipovic explained, on the NBC News website, “We need to push for real female power—for women to take the place of many of the men currently at the top of nearly every industry. That won’t totally prevent abuse, but it certainly would lessen it.”

This defense and pursuit of wealth can only take place to the extent that bourgeois law and order is maintained, that political opposition be diverted or contained. It is one of the paths to generalized repression.

It is entirely appropriate to term this campaign a sexual witch-hunt, in the political-legal sense of the term. Collins online dictionary defines witch-hunt (British) as “a rigorous campaign to round up or expose dissenters on the pretext of safeguarding the welfare of the public” and (American) as “an investigation carried out ostensibly to uncover disloyalty, subversive political activity, etc., usually conducted with much publicity and often relying upon inconclusive evidence and capitalizing on public fear of unpopular opinions.”

If the offensive against political subversives has not yet started, just give it time!

Hollywood’s Production Code, which primarily referred to sexual and antisocial behavior of various kinds and never once mentioned

politics or class struggle, was strictly enforced as of July 1, 1934. This was an exceptionally explosive year dominated by three widely supported strikes, led by left-wing Socialists, Trotskyists and Communist Party members—the Toledo Auto-Lite strike, Minneapolis truck drivers’ and San Francisco dock workers’ strikes.

The enforcing of the Code in the midst of the Depression unquestionably reflected a general and legitimate nervousness within the ruling class about the breakdown of all sorts of moral and social taboos and the more far-reaching consequences of such a breakdown. As we noted some time ago, “the imposition of the Production Code was *precisely one of the means* by which the film industry and its overseers made certain that the realities of the Depression would not find reflection on screen.”

The sexual misconduct campaign is dishonest in so many ways. There is the ludicrous pretense, for example, that Hollywood or the entertainment industry generally is the measure of sexual and workplace relations in America. In the 2014 General Social Survey, a random sample of Americans was asked, “In the last 12 months, were you sexually harassed by anyone while you were on the job?” In response, 3.6 percent of women said yes, a decrease from 6.1 percent in 2002. Not a conclusive statistic by any means, but not an indication of the “state of siege” described by the various columnists and pundits.

The latter could not care less about the conditions of the broad mass of the American or global population, female or male. Poverty, the destruction of pensions and health care benefits, the vicious rescinding of abortion rights, the attack on Planned Parenthood and other critical women’s health programs, homelessness, the opioid crisis and the jump in the rate of suicide do not concern them in the slightest. And where are their protests about the mass killing in Iraq and Afghanistan, about illegal drone strikes and “kill lists”?

The Democratic Party in particular is deeply immersed in the sexual crimes business. In the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton’s strategy for victory was based on the Brock Turner case at Stanford, bathroom access for transgender people and “white privilege.” The Democrats invested enormously in all this, and it failed. Now they are doubling down. “White privilege” has been supplemented by “male sexuality.” This is lodged in a definite, privileged section of the population.

Anyone who studies the Salem witch trials will come to the conclusion that it was not merely a fit of mass hysteria, but that definite economic and social processes were at work. As Christopher Bigsby observes, in an introduction to Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, “Salem in 1692 was in turmoil. The Royal Charter had been revoked. Original land titles had been canceled and others not yet secured. Neighbor accordingly looked on neighbor with some suspicion, for fear that land might be reassigned. It was also a community riven with schisms...”

Anyone serious about understanding the current sexual hysteria will need to get beneath the skin of present-day America and grasp its specific variety of “turmoil.”



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**