The public humiliation and destruction of Metropolitan Opera conductor James Levine

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The decision by the Metropolitan Opera in New York City to suspend James Levine, its longtime musical director (1976-2016), from any further conducting engagements is the latest victory for the *New York Times* and the champions of the new repression.

The sexual misconduct campaign in the US is metastasizing and in its reactionary sweep and recklessness borrowing elements from the McCarthyite purges of the 1950s, the New England witch trials of the 1690s and even the Inquisition of the late Middle Ages.

The *Times* is leading the gutter press in actively soliciting allegations, claims or rumors about alleged sexual misdeeds and heresies—heterosexual and homosexual alike—committed by prominent individuals. The newspaper has devoted considerable resources to tracking down such stories for the purposes of blackening a given personality's name and eviscerating him or her. The allegations against producer Harvey Weinstein, it is now obvious, merely served as a prelude and a pretext.

Four individuals have accused Levine of impropriety in incidents that happened from 30 to nearly 50 years ago. That unproven allegations about sexual interactions, which might have happened decades, or even a half-century ago, should be used to destroy Levine is nothing less than horrifying. The life work of a musician who has played a central role in the history of America's most important opera house is being buried beneath an avalanche of muck dredged up and reported in lurid detail by the *Times*. Should we all stand and shout "Bravo" for yellow journalism of this sort?

It is not evident, based on the *Times* account, that the three alleged incidents in the state of Michigan involved criminal behavior at all. Two individuals were 17 at the time, and the third was 20. The age of consent in the state is 16. The alleged victim in Illinois was 16 when the incident occurred, below the state's age of consent, 17.

Even if it were argued that the latter episode might have involved illegal activity, Levine has not been charged with any crime. The statute of limitations, which after all exists for a reason, has long since passed. And were Levine charged, he would be entitled to be presumed innocent until convicted by a court of law.

In any case, none of the incidents appear to have anything to do with Levine's tenure at the Metropolitan Opera, so it is unclear why the opera's board is investigating these events, let alone why it has suspended Levine.

The *New York Times* reports that Peter Gelb, the general manager of the opera house, "dismissed rumors circulating online that the Met had reached settlements in the past with the families of abused victims as untrue." Gelb stated, "Since I've been at the Met there has not been a single instance of somebody coming forward to make a complaint, ever, about Levine in recent Met history."

The Metropolitan's action is a cowardly capitulation to the hysteria incited by the filthy *New York Times*, whose demented publisher and editors are sniffing the bed sheets of the nation in search of sexual malefactors. As it publishes new denunciations each day, the newspaper calls on the public to keep it supplied with reports of sexual heresy.

The *Times* is appealing to the most backward, antidemocratic elements, as is revealed by the content and tone of many of the comments posted in response to its reports.

In a manner that has not been seen in modern American history, individuals are being compelled to answer for their entire sexual history. From the initial lurid accounts of the alleged predations engaged in by Weinstein, the operation has now gone on to encompass inquiries into whom Levine, now 74 years old, may have masturbated with when he was 25.

The various media outlets are clearly selecting major figures who they believe may be vulnerable to attack and "working backward," so to speak, operating on the basis that someone is bound to have either real or imagined grievances against the targeted individual.

Given the fact that until recently homosexuals were forced in many cases to conceal their sexual orientation and lead double lives, and that this, in fact, remains the situation for prominent gay people in various fields today, the particular

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vulnerability of homosexual performers and celebrities is obvious. The venomous attack on and "disappearing" of Kevin Spacey was not accidental. The theater, film and arts are being especially targeted, with an unmistakable whiff of the Nazi assault on "degenerate art."

Moreover, NBC's Matt Lauer was pilloried in the media for his alleged "womanizing." Efforts to ban extramarital and premarital sex may not be beyond the realm of possibility. Back to the good old days! And women would suffer the most from such a social reversion.

Levine is simply "collateral damage" in this larger campaign. In an unprecedented and utterly ruthless manner, one or the most significant, gifted figures in American and international music is being systematically, publicly humiliated and ruined.

In the 1890s, Irish writer Oscar Wilde was destroyed by the exposure of his homosexual encounters with young male prostitutes. Wilde was sentenced to two years' hard labor and the conditions in prison contributed to his early death. In his sentencing statement, Sir Alfred Wills, the judge, asserted that "You, Wilde, have been the center of a circle of extensive corruption of the most hideous kind among young men," and described the sentence as "totally inadequate for a case such as this." When Wilde attempted to speak, as the trial transcript reads, "And I? May I say nothing, my Lord?" he was drowned out by cries of "Shame!"

One friend of Wilde commented that the great playwright was guilty of only a "chronological error," that is, he was damned for what would not, in a more enlightened time, have been either condemned or viewed as "immoral" or criminal acts. Decades were to pass before the crucifixion of Wilde by the pillars of official morality came to be viewed with shame and profound regret. What is now happening to Spacey, Levine, Geoffrey Rush and others before our very eyes is essentially no different. They have run afoul of the would-be guardians of public morality at the wrong moment.

While it is at this foul business, perhaps the *Times* should raise concerns as well about Renaissance painter Leonardo da Vinci, arrested in 1476 for practicing "wickedness" with a 17-year-old apprentice. Leonardo faced the possibility of burning at the stake. One can only imagine how the *Times* would have dealt with *rumors* circulating in Florence about Michelangelo's relations with the model for his *David*. Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini engaged in sexual relations with young working class men. Bourgeois Italy and the Catholic Church violently denounced him. Why not write these and other sexual "deviants" out of the respectable artistic canon? It is beyond disgraceful, and testifies to its political bankruptcy, that the global pseudo-left (International Socialist Organization, *International Viewpoint*, etc.) goes along with and, in fact, cheers on this sinister moral crusade.

There will be many other victims as this drive escalates, and most of them will be unknown and unable to fight back. The *Times*, *Washington Post* and the rest are legitimizing the reactivation of vice squads in search of violations of "decency." Homes will be invaded and bedrooms entered, and cell phones and computers turned into omnipresent surveillance mechanisms, enabling the authorities to follow who is having sex with whom, in real time.

The fear of exposure creates a mood of terror, which is the aim of the operation: to intimidate, to clamp down on opposition and dissent, to shut people up.

All of this opens up new avenues for moral and political blackmail. Obey the interrogators or else!

The *Times* is offering itself up here as the authoritative, intrusive moral bedrock of American society in these troubling days of "fake news" and "Russian propaganda."

Having repudiated the social reforms of the New Deal and the Great Society periods, the political establishment seems bent on repudiating the "sexual revolution" as well.

Who can be certain of escaping the relentless inquisitors? Scores are being settled, some personal and some political. The Gods are athirst. No doubt, Levine has picked up enemies in the course of his lengthy career. He has held on to his post at the "Met" longer than some would like. He has no shortage of rivals who would like to see him gone.

In the case of Lauer, his "tough" questioning of Hillary Clinton during last year's election campaign made him many enemies in the hierarchy of the Democratic Party. More "shocking" revelations are to come. Even *New York Times* columnists—not to mention the warriors of identity politics—now applauding the witch-hunt may at some point be called to account for long-past and secret transgressions.

This wretched effort is connected to a political agenda, and to real repression. This is the Democratic Party, above all. Seeking to divert attention from the social devastation, the looting of the national Treasury through "tax reform" and the danger of horrific world war, the *Times*, *Post* and the others seek to whip up a frenzy about "sexual predators."

The *World Socialist Web Site* unequivocally condemns this reactionary campaign.

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