

Australian workers, actors, filmmakers oppose the “trial by media” of Geoffrey Rush

Our reporters

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Students, actors and workers in Sydney and Melbourne have spoken out against the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*'s defamatory and witch-hunting attacks on well-known Australian actor Geoffrey Rush.

Socialist Equality Party campaigners distributed the *World Socialist Web Site* article “Acclaimed Australian actor Geoffrey Rush becomes the latest witch-hunt victim” outside the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) in Sydney on Tuesday. The school was holding a series of events related to the annual Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) awards. The next day hundreds of copies of the article were distributed to actors and filmmakers attending the AACTA awards night at Star City Casino.

Many taking the article denounced the witch-hunt of Rush and voiced their agreement with the WSWs's analysis. Some of those expressing appreciation were nervous about making comments, an indication of the intimidating atmosphere that has been created by the media campaign and its underlying agenda.

Jana, a young actor from Melbourne, said anyone accused of inappropriate behaviour should be given “the evidence and details before anything goes to the media, and in Geoffrey's case, the person who is making accusations.

“The allegations should have been raised with him when they were supposed to have happened, instead of bringing them out 18 months later in the media. And to hold this information back and then publish it just before the [AACTA] awards is disgraceful and especially because this is a body that Geoffrey established and always supported.

“I've come from Melbourne for the awards event, but it has left a sour taste because the president has had to stand down over allegations that have no evidence

behind them. It's really disappointing.

“I hope they [the accusations] are not true, but there's no detail around anything. ‘Inappropriate behaviour’ could be as simple as ‘he swore at me.’ It could be that someone has got really petty and pathetic and decided to be an arsehole about it.”

An AFTRS teacher said: “I was shocked to hear the allegations, but now there's this sort of media momentum. It's good that people are able to speak out, but it's got to be tempered by due process.”

A young acting student said: “The media is pretty unfair and will take any opportunity to make money on account of anyone's career, no matter who they are. This is really sad. I want a career in this industry, but I reacted with disbelief to the allegations.”

In Melbourne on Saturday, SEP campaigners distributed the WSWs article outside the National Gallery of Victoria. There was broad support and sympathy for Rush. One young man commented: “If anybody sticks their head up and speaks out they can become a victim of this. It is a bit like Julian Assange.”

Christopher, a retired teacher, said: “I believe in a free media because we live in a democracy. But I wonder, what's the agenda of the media today in calling out and taking down people and then declaring that this is newsworthy?

“I'm shocked that this [the Hollywood sexual allegations] has come to Australia. Your article is a good one because it shows how easy it is for the media to attack somebody...

“Even if Geoffrey Rush wins the court case and gets damages, his reputation is still sullied, and financially a court case won't really affect an organisation like the Murdoch media empire. It's one thing if they're just doing it for publicity or just to sell the papers, but maybe they're out to destroy him for another reason.”

Anne, a young retail worker, said the *Daily Telegraph* had provided no evidence to substantiate its allegations. “Anyone can spread gossip and rumours, and that’s all it is really. But this has now escalated into a massive thing. It’s putting doubt in some people’s minds.”

“No one should jump to conclusions without proper evidence, and I think Geoffrey Rush should be given the respect he deserves, that he has built up over all these years as a family man and a career actor. People need to differentiate between what is a serious allegation and what’s just gossip.”

Commenting on Rush’s move to sue the Murdoch press, she said: “I think that’s good. He’s standing up for what he believes in and I’m sure a lot of other people will be behind him and support his decision.”

Stephanie, a legal worker, said, “The whole thing seems odd. I don’t know what the Sydney Theatre Company was doing, or if they knew what they were doing,” she said.

“I’ve also seen that the Melbourne Theatre Company issued a statement saying that Rush would be appearing in a production next year as planned. Why did they do that? Of course he will be appearing. If people are now going to be denied work based on mere hearsay, that’s wrong.”

Hugh and his wife **Marlene** discussed the broader issues at stake. “Anonymous accusations can now be made and publicised without knowing what they are, who they’re coming from, or what the motive might be,” Hugh said. “This is becoming an ever-increasing phenomenon. You should have the right to know the identity of your accuser and what the charges are.

“The word Kafkaesque comes to mind—it’s unbelievable that this kind of thing could happen. Every principle of natural justice we’ve had since the Enlightenment seems to have been thrown out of the window.”

Hugh explained that unspecified allegations had been used against him and his friends at their workplace.

“Don’t make the mistake of thinking that this kind of thing only happens to celebrities. This is becoming a general phenomenon and I think it is particularly used against older people—this can be an excuse to get us out of the work force. Scores are being settled, and often the motives are extremely dubious.”



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