

Why has *Time* magazine endorsed the #MeToo “revolution”?

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Time magazine has bestowed its Person of the Year 2017 honor on “The Silence Breakers,” i.e., those who have come forward to allege sexual misconduct. The group so honored includes actors Ashley Judd, Alyssa Milano, Rose McGowan and Selma Blair, singer Taylor Swift and television anchor Megyn Kelly, as well as lesser known women (and a few men).

Given the ongoing frenzy, the magazine’s decision was entirely predictable. Had its editors made any other choice, there would have been a media-organized uproar. By its action, *Time* has simply confirmed the fact that the #MeToo movement has the official backing of important portions of the American ruling elite.

In the feature article announcing the magazine’s decision, authors Stephanie Zacharek, Eliana Dockterman and Haley Sweetland refer three times to the current campaign over sexual harassment and assault as a “revolution.” But what sort of “revolution” receives the benediction of *Time*, one of the leading mouthpieces of the American establishment for more than 90 years?

The weekly news magazine has been an ardent defender of US imperialist interests for the entirety of its existence. Henry Luce, *Time*’s founder and longtime owner, and eventually one of the wealthiest men in America, was particularly close to the Central Intelligence Agency. He was a “good friend” of Allen Dulles—the agency’s director from 1953 to 1961—and “readily allowed certain members of his staff to work for the Agency and agreed to provide jobs and credentials for other CIA operatives who lacked journalistic experience” (Carl Bernstein, “The CIA and the Media,” *Rolling Stone*, 1977). There is no reason to believe that *Time*’s friendly relationship with the US government’s “Murder Inc.” has ended.

Why has this thoroughly compromised publication decided to honor “The Silence Breakers”?

As far as some of the more politically sensitive sections of the American ruling class are concerned, the current sexual misconduct scandals have two principal benefits. First, the purge of prominent figures in Hollywood, Washington and elsewhere on the mere say-so of accusers is another step on the road to authoritarian rule and the destruction of elementary democratic rights. Justified for nearly 20 years by the “war on terror” and other “national security” concerns, the assault on constitutionally guaranteed rights is far advanced. Individuals have been detained and tortured, drone missiles launched, “kill lists” drawn up, wars organized, and entire countries devastated without legal authorization and behind the backs of the American population.

The “gender cleansing” taking place, in which familiar and even popular personalities disappear (literally) overnight, McCarthyite-style, without having the right to defend themselves, often on the basis of anonymous accusations, has to be seen in this anti-democratic framework. One of the aims of the new repression is to create a climate of fear and intimidation. “Sexual predators”—and even “serial daters”!—may be the target at the moment, but in the longer term, the authorities have political

dissidents and left-wing opponents of the status quo in their sights.

Furthermore, the sexual witch-hunt, with its message that every woman is in the “same boat” against apparently universal male wrongdoing, is directed at muddying popular consciousness, strengthening the hold of identity politics, and diffusing and dissipating anger against economic disparities and social inequality. It is intended to divert attention from the almost unimaginable concentration of wealth in a few hands and legitimize a type of exclusivist, gender-based mobilization of females across class lines against the “patriarchy.”

The *Time* Person of the Year piece has this second objective very specifically and concretely in mind. It returns to the theme of female commonality across economic boundaries again and again. Near the beginning of their lengthy article, for instance, Zacharek, Dockterman and Sweetland inform us: “Movie stars are supposedly nothing like you and me. They’re svelte, glamorous, self-possessed. They wear dresses we can’t afford and live in houses we can only dream of. Yet it turns out that—in the most painful and personal ways—movie stars are more like you and me than we ever knew.”

Most explicitly, the authors observe later on: “The women and men who have broken their silence span all races, all income classes, all occupations and virtually all corners of the globe. They might labor in California fields, or behind the front desk at New York City’s regal Plaza Hotel, or in the European Parliament. They’re part of a movement that has no formal name. But now they have a voice.”

Describing the photo shoot for the article, the *Time* piece explains how “a group of women from different worlds met for the first time.” It continues: “Judd, every bit the movie star in towering heels, leaned in to shake hands with Isabel Pascual, a woman from Mexico who works picking strawberries and asked to use a pseudonym to protect her family. ... From a distance, these women could not have looked more different. Their ages, their families, their religions and their ethnicities were all a world apart. Their incomes differed not by degree but by universe... But on that November morning, what separated them was less important than what brought them together: a shared experience. ... They often had eerily similar stories to share.”

This is hardly subtle stuff. Nor is it the slightest bit credible.

It requires a very debased intellectual and social atmosphere for this preposterous argument to be made at all. Readers of *Time* are to believe, apparently, that Taylor Swift, with a reported net worth of \$280 million, because of “a shared experience”—sexual harassment (in the singer’s case, frankly, a trivial one)—has a powerful bond with great numbers of strawberry pickers, cashiers, hotel maids, home health aides and administrative assistants throughout the US.

Money, another publication owned by Time Inc., reported only last month that “Just weeks ahead of her album release Swift closed a deal on a new \$18 million townhouse in the affluent neighborhood of Tribeca in New York City—right next door to her penthouse. But while her two million-dollar homes in New York [are] right next to each other, Swift

also has homes elsewhere around the country. She has a \$25 million mansion in Beverley Hills, Calif., a \$17 million seaside home in Rhode Island and a \$2 million penthouse in Nashville.”

And Swift, an entertainer, is not the real issue here anyway, nor is Ashley Judd (with a reported net worth of \$22 million), as fervent and misguided as the latter’s views seem to be. Swift and Judd are more or less inadvertent stand-ins. What the *Time* authors are truly apologizing for is the immense wealth and power of the financial oligarchy. Behind and through the pop singers and movie stars, one is meant to sympathetically conjure up the images of Hillary Clinton, Sen. Elizabeth Warren and corporate executives such as Safra A. Catz of Oracle, whose total 2016 compensation was \$40.9 million, Margaret C. Whitman of Hewlett Packard (\$32.9 million), Virginia M. Rometty of IBM (\$32.3 million), Marissa A. Mayer of Yahoo (\$27.4 million), Indra K. Nooyi of PepsiCo (\$25.1 million) and Mary T. Barra of General Motors (\$22.4 million), all members of a downtrodden sex.

Clinton’s reactionary intervention in the Brock Turner case at Stanford University in June 2016, and the entire media storm around that affair, had that specific aim in mind. The public was meant to understand that Clinton too could find the case “heartbreaking.” Never mind that this was a blood-soaked warmonger firmly in the pocket of Wall Street. Her empathy as a woman provided her with “progressive” credentials. The *Time* Person of the Year award is an extension of this rotten propaganda campaign.

Clinton and the entire American elite had good reason to be nervous. When CNN’s Jennifer Agiesta analyzed the age and gender breakdown in 27 states where CNN conducted exit and entrance polls during the Democratic Party primaries in 2016, she found “socialist” Bernie Sanders “led Clinton by an average of 37 percentage points among women 18 to 29—a stunning result given Clinton’s emphasis on the historic nature of her candidacy.”

This reflects an objective economic reality—that large numbers of young and working class women face hardship and a bleak future and have no interest in identifying themselves with figures such as Clinton, Warren, Nancy Pelosi, Diane Feinstein, Kirsten Gillibrand, Michelle Obama, Nikki Haley, Theresa May, Angela Merkel, Christine Lagarde, Condoleezza Rice, Sonia Gandhi and Aung San Suu Kyi, much less the Whitmans, Romettys and Barras and the rest of the female war criminals and exploiters who afflict the globe along with their male counterparts.

As we have noted recently on the WSWS, “Decades of identity politics have disoriented and corrupted social thought. The displacement of the scientific evaluation of society on the basis of class with the flimflam of gender and race has lowered social consciousness.”

The inability or unwillingness of those being swayed by the sexual misconduct controversy to place America’s new “Scarlet Letter” moment in any historical or social context surely reflects this.

The feminist argument, reflected too in some of the correspondence to the WSWS on the current ruckus, that there is a “universal female experience” based on a common reality or fear of male sexual violence is entirely spurious. Of course, there are common female as opposed to male experiences, as there are common male as opposed to female experiences, as there are, for that matter, “universal” human as opposed to other mammalian facts of life. None of these even remotely form the basis of socialist or even politically democratic politics.

The collectively decisive transactions that people have are socioeconomic ones and reflect their relations to the dominant economic state of affairs, to what Frederick Engels termed “the stubborn facts of the existing system of production.” In fact, the degree to which “nature” and biology immediately influence the outcome of women’s lives in the US has dramatically declined in recent decades. Individual women may tragically have their lives traumatized, devastated or even destroyed by sexual violence, but that is not the universal or even nearly universal experience. The far more common experience is direct capitalist

exploitation and economic violence. In the US, women accounted for 18 percent of the labor force in 1900. As of 2015, women accounted for 47 percent of the American labor force, or 73,000,000 women, and some 49.3 percent of all jobs (because so many women have more than one job).

Sexual assault and rape are serious crimes, which undoubtedly go under-reported, especially, as we have noted, in the military, in prisons, in factories and workplaces, and in other locations where the most oppressed layers of the population, including immigrants, are under the thumb of the powerful. This is an appalling fact of contemporary existence.

However, the claim that women live in, or ought to live in, never-ending terror of physical attack from the other sex is both insulting and untrue. Naïve, well-meaning individuals who have been sucked into the sexual misconduct frenzy may advance the notion, but its origin is often religion-saturated and sinister.

It is no accident that ultra-rightist Curt Anderson, an aide in the Reagan White House, former RNC political director, strategist for Gov. Bobby Jindal’s presidential campaign and currently a partner at a Republican consulting firm, chimes in along these lines, in the *Federalist* of December 6.

The headline of Anderson’s article, “Thank Separating Sex From Morality For The Great American Sexual Meltdown,” and its sub-headline, “*The sexual abuse and harassment sweepstakes we are witnessing today is the direct result of our society deciding that Christian morality is narrow, repressive, and above all, not cool,*” are themselves revealing. Anderson goes on to comment in the body of his piece, “What the Left misses is the simple fact that once you remove all moral codes, men will in fact behave badly. Count on it. The theological explanation would be the doctrine of ‘original sin.’ The modern explanation would be that ‘men are pigs.’”

In any event, if one wants to adopt the mere standard of the imminent possibility of violence and death, men in modern capitalist society live at far greater risk. Linda Bannon, in *Gender: Psychological Perspectives* (2016), notes that “More than 90 percent of workplace fatalities involve men.” For that matter, according to a 2010 national survey by the Centers for Disease Control and US Department of Justice, in the previous 12 months, more men than women had been victims of intimate partner physical violence and over 40 percent of severe physical violence had been directed at men.

Anthony Synott, in *The Body Social* (1993), argues that “Violence is much more of a problem for men than for women... [M]en die more often in traffic accidents, industrial accidents, domestic accidents and others than women. ... Their mortality rate is about 40 percent higher than women’s, which translates into about eight years of the lifespan. Some have called this mortality pattern ‘androcide,’ and portray men (rather than women) as victims of culture and/or biology.”

Should men then unite across class lines against this apparent conspiracy of cultural and social violence? This is the rationale behind the right-wing “Men’s Rights” movement, whose views we reject with contempt. Sexual assault, domestic violence and industrial deaths are all the product of class society and all demand doing away with capitalist social relationships.

There is no more a socially significant “universal female experience” than there is a socially decisive “universal black experience,” the claims of Black Lives Matter and such charlatans as Ta-Nehisi Coates notwithstanding. There are women and then there are women, there are African Americans and then there are African Americans. Arguments about the conditions of “everyone” in a particular group are invariably mounted by a very specific *sub-grouping*, a privileged petty-bourgeois element (or those foolishly swept along by the flow) seeking to promote its own interests.

The contention that women of all social classes should unite out of fear of male sexual violence and subordinate themselves to bourgeois feminist (and, in fact, Democratic Party) politics arises, appropriately enough, at a

time when the social polarization of the female population itself has reached new heights, i.e., when class antagonisms among women are more stark and dramatic than at any point in history.

This is not a subject the feminist movement cares to address. As Kathleen Geier observed, tellingly, in the *Nation* in November 2016, “Class differences among women are an all but taboo subject.”

However, certain researchers and academics have paid attention to “within-gender” inequalities. British economist Alison Wolf, the Sir Roy Griffiths Professor of Public Sector Management at King’s College London and author of *The XX Factor* (2013), pointed out in 2013: “Inequality among women is growing very fast indeed. In both the UK and the US, the percentage of total female earnings that goes to the top female 1 per cent has doubled since the 1980s” (*The Spectator*).

Wolf has also noted (in the *Guardian* in 2015) that “The past half-century has been amazing for highly educated women. For them, professional success is the new normality. ... But it also means that the female elite is increasingly different from other women. Class trumps gender. And inequality among women is rising much faster than inequality among men.” And further, in the same piece, “‘Sisterhood’ is dead. Different women have very different lives, and interests.”

Ruth Milkman, professor of sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center, wrote in 2017 in *The Sociologist*, “Class inequalities among women are greater than ever before. Highly educated, upper-middle class women—a group that is vastly overrepresented in both media depictions of women at work and in the wider political discourse about gender inequality—have far better opportunities than their counterparts in earlier generations did. Yet their experience is a world apart from that of the much larger numbers of women workers who struggle to make ends meet in poorly-paid clerical, retail, restaurant, and hotel jobs; in hospitals and nursing homes; or as housekeepers, nannies, and home care workers.”

Leslie McCall, professor of sociology and political science at Northwestern University, observed in 2013 (“Men against Women, or the Top 20 Percent against the Bottom 80?”), “Since 1970 ... women’s earnings at the top grew faster than those of men at the top in every decade. ... By contrast, the median earnings of full-time women workers were flat over the last decade, just as they were for men. This marks a historical reversal of the healthy gains in earnings of nearly all women for the past several decades.”

Moreover, as Wolf argued in 2013, in a promotion for her book, *The XX Factor*, “Among younger men and women with equal education levels, who have also put in equal time in the same occupation, there are no gender pay gaps left.”

Hence the particular vehemence of the sexual misconduct campaign under conditions of bitter conflicts over advancement within the middle class professions. There is the desperate need to present a picture of all-pervasive sexual harassment and virtually constant torment in order to leverage further advancement (and in Hollywood, in some cases, to revive fading or disappointing careers). This is the source, in part, of the exaggerated claims, the apparently bottomless and nauseating self-pity and egomania exhibited by people making millions of dollars, and all the rest.

Aside from the occasional lip service, the identity politics warriors have no interest in the needs or fate of working class women, whose conditions have deteriorated, along with those of working class men, for decades. Tens of millions of working class women remain stuck in low-paid, dead-end, often grueling jobs. In 2013, for example, according to the Department of Labor, some 72 percent of cashiers were female (median weekly earnings, \$379, or \$19,708 yearly), 88 percent of maids and housekeeping cleaners (\$406 a week), 95 percent of childcare workers (\$418 a week), 84 percent of personal care aides (\$445 a week) and 89 percent of teacher assistants (\$475 a week).

Neither the Democratic Party officialdom, the *New York Times* or *Time*

magazine, nor any of the “Me Too” sex vigilantes and media personalities raise the urgent problems of poverty wages, health care and abortion rights, affordable childcare, public education or immigrants’ rights. A major study published in April 2016 by Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health, a research group at the University of California, San Francisco, found there were “profound” long-term connections between women’s lives and the consequences of being denied access to abortion. They found “that women who carry unwanted pregnancies to term are more likely to live in poverty, while 40 percent surveyed said they had sought abortions for financial reasons.” The Democratic Party caved in on this issue years ago.

The irony, of course, is that when the furor dies down and no one remembers the ins and outs of the present sexual misconduct scandal, it will become evident that the only consistent and principled defenders of the elementary rights of women, gays and African Americans are the socialists.

We stand in the tradition of Rosa Luxemburg and Eleanor Marx on this front, with their commitment to democratic rights, progress and the class interests of the working class, female and male, and their scorn for bourgeois feminists and bourgeois public opinion.

In 1892, Eleanor Marx commended a recent congress of the Socialist International in Brussels that had “clearly stressed the difference between the party of the ‘women’s-righters’ on the one side, who recognised no class struggle but only a struggle of sexes, who belong to the possessing class, and who want rights that would be an injustice against their working class sisters, and, on the other side, the real women’s party, the socialist party, which has a basic understanding of the economic causes of the present adverse position of working women and which calls on the working women to wage a common fight hand-in-hand with the men of their class against the common enemy, viz. the men and women of the capitalist class.”

Marx’s daughter went on to point out 125 years ago that for the “women’s-righter” as well as for the misogynist, “‘woman’ is just woman. Neither of them sees that there is the exploiter woman of the middle class and the exploited woman of the working class. For us, however, the difference does exist. We see no more in common between a Mrs. Fawcett [Millicent Fawcett, president of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies] and a laundress than we see between Rothschild and one of his employees. In short, for us there is only the working class movement.”

The struggle against all forms of violence against women is the struggle for the unity of the working class and socialism. This is the fight being waged by the Socialist Equality Party, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and its sister organizations (sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International) throughout the world.



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