

# Opposition mounts to sexual harassment witch-hunt

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As the campaign over allegations of sexual misconduct has unfolded, it has become clear that what is involved is of far greater magnitude than the form in which it initially emerged—allegations against one Hollywood producer, Harvey Weinstein. With the initial shock beginning to wane, opposition is emerging from some of those targeted.

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) personality Tavis Smiley, who was summarily suspended Wednesday based on anonymous and unspecified allegations, issued a blistering statement denouncing PBS for launching a “so-called investigation” without even contacting him. After Smiley caught wind of the inquiry through worried calls from friends who had been questioned, he threatened a lawsuit to demand that he be given an opportunity to answer the accusations.

“If having a consensual relationship with a colleague years ago is the stuff that leads to this kind of public humiliation and personal destruction, heaven help us,” Smiley wrote. “PBS investigators refused to review any of my personal documentation, refused to provide me the names of any accusers, refused to speak to my current staff, and refused to provide me any semblance of due process to defend myself against allegations from unknown sources.”

“This has gone too far,” he concluded. “And I, for one, intend to fight back.”

Ignoring Smiley’s democratic rights, Mills Entertainment announced yesterday that it was canceling its backing for his upcoming 40-city theatrical dramatization of the last year of the life of Martin Luther King Jr.—who was himself the target of an FBI-orchestrated campaign over “unnatural” and “abnormal” sexual behavior.

Smiley’s statement came only a few days after Australian actor Geoffrey Rush, the target of a campaign by Rupert Murdoch’s *Daily Telegraph* smearing him as a “sexual predator,” announced that he is filing a lawsuit against the newspaper to “redress the slurs, innuendo and hyperbole they have created around my standing.” He added, “The situation is intolerable and I must now seek vindication of my good name through the courts.”

Despite these signs of opposition, the campaign is metastasizing to implicate an ever-expanding array of individuals and actions. On Friday, the first woman to be targeted, Kansas Democrat Andrea Ramsey, announced that she was ending her campaign for Congress. Local media reported that the company for which she worked had settled a lawsuit filed by a former male employee who accused Ramsey of firing him after he rejected her sexual advances. The Democratic Party leadership cut off support for Ramsey after reports of the accusations, which Ramsey asserts are lies.

Under the blanket category of “sexual harassment,” an extremely broad range of activity, including that which falls under the framework of normal interpersonal relations, is effectively being criminalized and associated with the horrific crime of rape. The effect is to create a situation where virtually anyone can be singled out and smeared with the charge of being a “sexual predator.”

Parallel efforts are being made to incorporate these conceptions into law. In a letter this week to the *New York Times*, Carmelyn Malalis, the chairwoman of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, approvingly cited laws in New York City that include in the definition of harassment anything that rises above “petty slights and trivial inconveniences,” meaning, in Malalis’s words, “any unwanted sexual behavior, including sexual comments or jokes, gestures, touching, texts or emails that create a hostile work environment.”

This means that misinterpreted word or gesture can result in being fired and blacklisted. This goes a long way in drastically undermining the First Amendment protection of free speech.

From the beginning of the Trump presidency, the Democrats have sought to channel popular opposition to the administration behind a right-wing agenda based on the demands of powerful factions of the military-intelligence apparatus. Hence the campaign over “fake news,” Russian hacking, and now sexual harassment.

Thomas Edsall, in a column published this week (“The

Politics of #HimToo”), acknowledges that the campaign is largely driven by political considerations. The column is all the more significant given that it appears in the *New York Times*, the leading voice in pursuing the sexual witch hunt.

“The issue of sexual misconduct has emerged as a centerpiece of Democratic strategy for taking on President Trump and the Republican Party,” Edsall writes. “For Democrats, who have struggled to find traction in their battles with the administration, the explosion of allegations has created an opening to put the focus on Trump—a development greatly enhanced by the Moore debacle.” The latter is a reference to the defeat of the fascistic Republican Roy Moore by right-wing Democrat Doug Jones in this week’s election to the US Senate in Alabama.

Earlier this month, leading Democrats, including House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, opposed a motion to impeach Trump that was based on his fascistic and racist policies. Now, however, according to a separate article in the *Times*, “Ms. Pelosi has strongly endorsed the push for new hearings on the sexual misconduct complaints against the president.”

Edsall cites the comments of several individuals who have raised concerns over the implications of the sexual harassment campaign. Emily Yoffe in *Politico* worries whether the “amazing moment” could “go off track if all accusations are taken on faith, if due process is seen as an impediment rather than a requirement and an underpinning of justice.” Paul Rosenberg warns in *Salon* of a “Democratic rush to judgment, casting due process to the wind, in order to strike a virtue-signaling pose that almost surely will look increasingly dark in years to come.” Elizabeth Bartholet, a professor at the Harvard Law School, writes of the campaign as “another moment we may look back on as a moment characterized by madness and sexual panic.”

Edsall concludes, however, that such considerations will have no impact on the political operation underlying the #MeToo campaign in the run-up to the 2020 elections.

The strategy of the Democratic Party toward the Trump administration is bound up with a protracted political and social process. The past forty years have seen an extreme concentration of wealth. This has involved not only the amassing of vast fortunes by America’s billionaires—three of whom now own more than half of the population—but also a growing chasm between the top five or ten percent of the population, the upper-middle class, and the bottom 90 percent. The interests and concerns of this layer are distinct from and hostile to the interests of the working class.

Politically, the Democratic Party has severed its previous association with social reform. It is a party of Wall Street, the military/intelligence apparatus and the upper-middle class, based on identity politics. This culminated in the Clinton campaign, which sought to divert mass opposition to

social inequality and war through the promotion of such issues as the law-and-order demand for harsher sentencing surrounding the case of Stanford University student Brock Turner. This was coupled with the slander that workers who did not support the Democratic Party campaign were expressing white and male “privilege.” The reactionary strategy of that campaign is now being resurrected in the context of the Trump administration.

The campaign over alleged sexual misconduct is unfolding against the backdrop of mounting war threats that could unleash a nuclear catastrophe. A growing proportion of workers and young people confront staggering levels of poverty without any prospect for a decent job, even as Congress moves to ram through a massive tax cut for the rich. Every day, 150 workers die as a result of work-related accidents and illnesses. The ruling class is moving to abolish democratic rights and free speech online, as underscored by the decision of the Trump administration to end net neutrality.

All of this is being ignored in the campaign over sexual harassment. Class divisions are covered up beneath the claim that all women, regardless of their income, share the same “experience” of being oppressed by men, who, particularly if they are white, enjoy the benefits of the “privileged.”

The sexual harassment campaign is right-wing, antidemocratic and politically reactionary. It has nothing to do with the interests of the workers, men or women.

The opposition to the Trump administration and the entire political establishment must be developed as an independent movement of the working class directed consciously against capitalism and all the horrors this system brings.



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