Why is Canada's Liberal government endorsing the #MeToo witch-hunt?

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Events over recent weeks in Canada have underscored the reactionary character of the #MeToo furore over alleged sexual misconduct. The initiative has been transformed into nothing less than a state-sponsored offensive, backed by the right-wing, pro-corporate press, with the twin aims of mobilizing a base of support among well-heeled sections of the middle class for the intensification of Canadian imperialism's aggressive foreign policy goals, and suppressing deepening class anger among the working class under a torrent of identity politics propaganda.

At a so-called "AfterMeToo" conference organized December 6 in Toronto by the *Globe and Mail*, the mouthpiece of the Bay Street financial elite, Justice Minister and Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould delivered the keynote address. Canada's top legal official unequivocally endorsed the hysterical atmosphere that has been whipped up over the past two months, describing sexual harassment, the catch-all term which covers everything from complimenting a member of the opposite sex on their appearance to violent sexual assault, as pervasive throughout society and denouncing "perpetrators."

She accused everyone of complicity in this state of affairs. "When a harasser is denounced, we are not ruffling feathers or creating a storm, we are ending violence," she asserted. "The tacit enabling of harassers through silence is utterly unacceptable. Each and every one of us has a role to play. All people of all genders must find their voice and acknowledge their role in stopping this conduct."

It is necessary for everyone to "open our eyes to the prevalence of sexual violence and harassment," she went on, because "silence creates a culture of complicity."

This reactionary narrative seeks to poison popular consciousness and divert attention away from the fundamental cause of all forms of exploitation: the capitalist profit system. Instead, we are to believe that the population is seething with desires for sexual violence that have to be curbed by an authoritarian state.

This found expression in the list of recommendations produced by the #AfterMeToo gathering, which included the creation of an "independent" national reporting body to gather allegations of sexual assault in the entertainment industry. This would not only present figures on sexual misconduct claims, but have the power to hand down "punitive measures" in what amounts to the establishment of a system of alternative justice, with provisions that break with core legal precepts, including the right to be deemed innocent until proven guilty.

These thoroughly reactionary proposals are being sold as "progressive" by Canada's pseudo-left groups. Last month, Mannon Masse, co-leader of the Quebec separatist Quebec Solidaire, presented a legislative plan for so-called alternative justice methods, while the Fightback group, which functions as a cheerleader for the social democratic New Democratic Party, called for "mass mobilizations" to "force the courts … to think seriously the next time they consider trivializing the experience of a sexual assault survivor," i.e., mob justice.

Significantly, Wilson-Raybould drew a direct connection in her speech to the Trudeau government's predatory imperialist ambitions on the world stage. She enthused over Canada's "feminist Prime Minister" who has pledged as part of a "women's strategy for peace and security" to intervene into countries around the world in the name of defending "women's rights." This transparent fraud is no different from the "human rights" propaganda that has been used to legitimize one US-led war of aggression after another, which over the past quarter century have led to the deaths of millions of women, men and children, and the forcing of millions more from their homes.

Wilson-Raybould applauded Trudeau's speech at the United Nations General Assembly, where he said that Canada is among the most "peaceful, democratic, respectful and cohesive nations." She deliberately avoided raising the fact that Trudeau maintained a shameful silence on the blood-curdling threat issued at the very same General Assembly by US President Donald Trump, who warned he was ready to "totally destroy" North Korea—a country of 25 million women, men and children.

The devastation of the lives of Yugoslav, Afghan, Libyan, Iraqi and Syrian families, including the Canadian government's complicity in torture and its efforts to cover up widespread reports of the sexual abuse of prisoners of war by the Afghan military, is not the concern of the privileged layers of the population attracted to #MeToo. In fact, they are looking for a "progressive" cover to bolster their support for the Liberals' 70 percent increase in defence spending over the next decade.

The role of the *Globe and Mail*

Anybody who believes that the motives of the #MeToo campaign in Canada are genuine should consider the implications of the fact that it has been led and essentially organized by the *Globe and Mail*, a publication owned by Canada's richest family—the Thomsons. Considered Canada's "newspaper of record," the *Globe* has consistently spoken on behalf of the most ruthless sections of the financial elite. It endorsed the hard-right government of Stephen Harper, once praising the Prime Minister who waged a frontal assault on Canadian workers, attacked democratic rights in the name of the "war on terror" and waged wars abroad for his "bullheadedness."

Under the salacious headline "The Weinstein domino effect: Who else is accused of sexual misconduct so far? Read the list," the *Globe* is enthusiastically encouraging mob justice by adding anyone who has faced an accusation of "misconduct," however vague it may be, to a public blacklist. Each entry is helpfully accompanied with a picture of the accused individual, making a mockery of any conception of due process.

The *Globe's* sanctimonious moralizing is all the more repugnant given its unabashed defence of ruthless class exploitation in Canada, where the top 100 CEOs earn close to 200 times the wage of an average worker and

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an average of four workers die on the job every day.

The *Globe*, accompanied by the pseudo-left cheerleaders for #MeToo, want to bury this social reality—the "lived experience" of male and female working class people alike—under a mountain of filthy propaganda about a society polarized along gender lines. Their goal is to convince the female worker on the assembly line, or on a low-wage, temporary contract that she has common interests with Linda Hasenfratz (Linamar Corp., 2015 income: $14.2 million). These privileged and egotistical sections of the upper middle class claim that the problems facing working class women are not the result of capitalist exploitation, from which a small minority of male and female capitalists profit, but the omnipotent oppression of women by men.

On this latter point, real material interests are involved. Wealthy individuals, drawn from well-heeled sections of the top 10 percent of income earners, are attempting to bolster their wealth and privilege by forcing a redistribution of the vast riches at the top of society while leaving capitalist exploitation untouched. A *Globe* article in March complained that women make up just 22 percent of the top 1 percent of earners (minimum income: $225,100), 15 percent of the top 0.1 percent (minimum income: $724,000), and 10 percent of the top 0.01 percent (minimum income: $2.7 million).

While the *Globe* and its cheerleaders will stop at nothing to ensure that the multi-millionaire parasites exploiting workers of all sexes are perfectly gender balanced, they treat Canada's glaring social inequality as the natural order of things. As leading *Globe* columnist Konrad Yakabuski wrote in a November 27 comment at the height of the #MeToo frenzy, titled "What Trudeau isn't saying about inequality," "Some of the most brilliant minds on the planet have been grappling to come up with ways to reverse the increase in income inequality that many believe is behind rising populism in Western democracies. Spoiler alert: Most have concluded there are none, or none that are politically feasible."

Progressive taxes, Yakabuski informed his readers, "don't meaningfully move the dial," while the welfare state of post-war Europe "smothers the animal spirits that help economies innovate and grow." Perhaps giving away more than he intended about the fear within ruling circles of a mass social upheaval, he noted, "Throughout history, only massive, violent shocks that upended the established order proved powerful enough to flatten disparities in income and wealth."

The *Globe's* intrepid reporters are not only deploying right-wing feminism to prevent such an eventuality. Taking its cue from the *New York Times*, the *Globe* has become a purveyor of various forms of identity politics, elevating questions of race, gender and sexual orientation above all else. In September 2016, the newspaper launched the podcast "colour Code." Its introduction somewhat preposterously declares, "If there's one thing Canadians avoid, it's talking about race. This podcast is here to change that."

Canada's "feminist foreign policy" and the drive to war

Another critical element in the official promotion of #MeToo is the fashioning of a "progressive" justification for Canadian military aggression around the world. Under successive governments, Canada has been engaged in virtually uninterrupted war since 1999 and opposition to military conflict in the population is widespread. But the Trudeau government, like its Conservative predecessors, is determined to press ahead with a military buildup and deepen cooperation with US imperialism, the most violent and destabilizing force on the planet.

Over recent months, Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland has repeatedly invoked the idea of a "feminist foreign policy," the hollow character of which can be seen by her government's readiness to sell $15 billion worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia—a country where women, and the vast majority of men, are brutally oppressed by an absolutist monarchy. In a June speech, in which she declared that "hard power," i.e. war, must be part of Canada's future foreign policy, Freeland declared that the government was preparing to unveil Canada's "first feminist international assistance policy."

The proposal was raised in the context of Freeland's explicit defence of the "rules-based international order," meaning the maintenance of US global hegemony established in the wake of World War II. Hailing Canada's deployment of 400 soldiers to Latvia, where they are playing a central role in NATO's aggressive military buildup on Russia's doorstep, Freeland added, "It is important, and historic, that we have a prime minister and a government proud to proclaim ourselves feminists. Women's rights are human rights."

What this means in practice was made clear a day later when Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan outlined the government's spending commitments and presented the government's new defence policy. The dramatic spending increase includes plans to purchase an expanded fleet of fighter jets, new warships, and armed drones, which have become notorious for their use by the US to conduct assassinations. Sajjan argued for an increase in the army by 5,000, and unveiled a program designed to increase the number of women in the armed forces to 25 percent of its total.

The promotion of #MeToo is intimately bound up with this reactionary agenda to ensure gender equality on the battlefield of the next imperialist war. Nearly 15 years after the mass protests against the Iraq war, opposition to militarism and war among the working class remains strong. It has yet to find public expression, principally because those pseudo-left forces who previously posed as anti-war have transformed themselves into avid cheerleaders for imperialist violence. Frequently, as in the bombardment of Libya, they have sought to dress up wars of aggression with references to the defence of "human rights" and by employing the language of identity politics. The government's official endorsement for #MeToo is aimed at instrumentallizing such propaganda and the political forces who promote it to legitimize new wars of aggression and militarist violence.

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