

France's Socialist Party attacks Catherine Deneuve for opposing #MeToo witch-hunt

Alex Lantier
11 January 2018

The politically courageous column published by 100 women in *Le Monde* criticizing the #MeToo campaign has provoked a venomous response from the French ruling elite. The column—co-signed by personalities including actresses Catherine Deneuve and Ingrid Caven, and writers Catherine Millet and Catherine Robbe-Grillet—pulled no punches. It made clear that the #MeToo frenzy, which emerged last year from the US media campaign accusing producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual abuse of women, is a right-wing political campaign.

Refusing to confuse “persistently or clumsily hitting on someone” with rape, it opposed the “incursion of self-appointed prosecutors into private lives” and demands that intellectual and artistic life conform to #MeToo’s dictates. It bluntly warned that by demanding censorship of explicit artworks and humiliating public confessions from men accused of sexual misdeeds, #MeToo was creating “a climate like a totalitarian society.”

This exposure of #MeToo has provoked outrage among forces that have long specialized in packaging right-wing forms of identity politics as “left.” The Socialist Party (PS), France’s main social democratic party of government since the May-June 1968 general strike and a key purveyor of gender politics, led the charge. Leading PS figures, reeling from the party’s disintegration in the 2017 elections amid mass anger at its austerity policies and wars, picked up their pens to hysterically denounce Deneuve and other signatories as rape apologists.

In fact, an examination of their arguments—a mixture of unsubstantiated accusations, threats and foul-mouthed slanders on the column’s signatories, mainly Deneuve—vindicate the column’s assessment of the anti-democratic, right-wing character of the #MeToo movement.

Ségolène Royal, the defeated, free-market PS presidential candidate in 2007, led the attack on Deneuve on Twitter. Implying that Deneuve is indifferent to the dignity of women, she wrote, “Such a shame our great Catherine Deneuve signed this horrifying text. All of our thoughts, we men and women who care for the dignity of women, go out

to the victims of sexual violence, who are crushed by their fear of speaking out.”

A wave of vitriolic comments denouncing Deneuve sprang up around Royal’s Tweet. One Twitter user (@JessRtr) mocked the *Le Monde* column’s title, “We defend the liberty to inconvenience people, which is indispensable to sexual liberty.” She called on #MeToo sympathizers to sexually harass Deneuve: “Don’t forget to use your liberty to inconvenience by putting a big hand on Catherine Deneuve’s buttocks when you see her.”

The centerpiece of the PS response, however, was a foul-mouthed and slanderous comment signed by 30 feminist militants, and drafted by prominent PS member Caroline De Haas. Published on the web site of state-run France Télévisions, it constitutes the official, state-sanctioned response to the *Le Monde* column: falsely accusing the women who signed the *Le Monde* column of being rape apologists.

The web page containing the statement quotes De Haas as saying: “The signatories of the column in *Le Monde* are mostly repeat offenders in terms of defending pedophilia or rape apologetics. They are again using their media prominence to trivialize sexual violence. They are in fact showing their contempt for millions of women who are suffering or have suffered such violence.”

This is a vicious misrepresentation of the *Le Monde* column, which does not apologize for rape. Indeed, the column begins by establishing a firm distinction between rape and nonviolent if unwanted sexual propositions, declaring: “Rape is a crime. But persistently or clumsily hitting on someone is not a criminal offense, nor is gallantry male-chauvinist aggression.”

This distinction between rape and unwanted sexual propositions outrages De Haas. Towards the beginning of her statement, she writes: “The signatories of the column deliberately mix up a seductive relationship based on pleasure with violence. Mixing everything up is so convenient. It allows them to put everything in the same bag.”

It is not Deneuve and the other *Le Monde* want to “put everything in the same bag,” but—as the *Le Monde* column explained—De Haas and the #MeToo movement. The argument of De Haas obliterates the distinction between any form of unwanted sexual proposition and rape, all of which are lumped together as “violence.”

Starting from this, De Haas reaches a toxic and reactionary conclusion: all women everywhere must live in constant terror of horrific sexual violence. “Acts of violence weigh on women,” she says. “Every single one. They weigh on our spirits, our bodies, our pleasures and our sexuality. ... We have a fundamental right to live our lives in security. But in France, in the United States, in Senegal, in Thailand or in Brazil: that is not the case today. Not anywhere.”

This hellish vision is the one the *Le Monde* signatories correctly opposed when they criticized the view that women are “eternal victims, poor little things in the clutches of demonic phalocrats.”

The De Haas statement is utterly contemptuous of fundamental issues of democratic rights raised by the *Le Monde* signatories in criticizing #MeToo. They warned of violation of basic due process rights in the sudden firing of men from their posts before any criminal charges had been brought, let alone gone to trial. They protested the censoring of nudes by Egon Schiele and a Balthus painting, calls for a ban of a Roman Polanski retrospective, and instructions issued to writers to rewrite their works to conform with #MeToo’s demands.

De Haas dismisses these issues, which she does not bother to even mention, and replies with crude caricatures. Mocking claims that, “We can’t say anything anymore” after #MeToo, she writes, “As if the fact that our society is (somewhat) less tolerant of sexist comments, like racist and homophobic comments, were a problem! ‘Come on, wasn’t it really better when we could call women whores and not have problems?’ No. It was not.”

Such remarks can be understood only in the context of the hostility to democratic rights and to the working class of the European social democracy and its middle class periphery.

While in government under President François Hollande, the PS imposed a two-year state of emergency that suspended basic democratic rights from 2015 to 2017. Justified based on whipping up fears of Muslims after the November 2015 Islamist terror attacks in Paris, it was used to violently crack down on mass protests against the PS’ deeply unpopular and anti-working class labor law. Its main provisions, such as allowing the state to ban protests and impose indefinite house arrest without charges, have since been written permanently into law.

From within the PS and its network of allied petty

bourgeois promoters of identity politics, such as the New Anti-capitalist Party, there was no opposition to the state of emergency. Now, corporations are using the reactionary PS labor law to try to impose sub-minimum wage salary levels in the oil industry, and mass job cuts in the automobile industry.

De Haas concludes her statement, however, by trying to posture as “left,” criticizing Deneuve and other *Le Monde* signatories by claiming—without any evidence—that they are biased against working people. She writes, “Many of them are prompt to denounce sexism when it comes from men in working class neighborhoods. But when the hand on the ass [i.e. sexual violence] comes from a man of their own social station, they think it is part of the right to inconvenience people. Such ambivalence shows how serious their self-proclaimed attachment to feminism is.”

This attack on Deneuve and the other *Le Monde* signatories is repugnant. Who in this debate over #MeToo is defending the democratic rights of women?

Is it the supporters of #MeToo? Is it the political flunkys in the PS—a party formed nearly 50 years ago as an alliance of the banks, the state bureaucracy, and sections of the post-1968 student movement, and which has since last year collapsed to a tiny rump hated by the French people for its right-wing policies? Is it De Haas, slandering Deneuve and other leading actresses and artists as rape apologists with the backing of French state television and President Emmanuel Macron?

Or is it Deneuve, undoubtedly one of the greatest and most beloved French actresses of the last half-century, who has long endorsed left-wing causes including the 1973 struggle for the legalization of abortion and the 2009 struggle against the anti-file sharing law, and whose extensive career includes two César awards for best actress—as a courageous woman hiding her Jewish husband in Occupied Paris in *The Last Metro* (1981), and the heiress of a doomed colonial rubber plantation in a searing portrait of French imperialism in *Indochine* (1992)?

Readers can draw their own conclusions.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact