

“If only there were more female billionaires!”— New York Times

David Walsh
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The *New York Times Sunday Review* (March 10) prominently featured an article by Susan Chira, a senior correspondent and editor on gender issues at the newspaper, headlined, “Money Is Power. And Women Need More of Both.”

The column is forthright: “Women are running for political office in record numbers this year. They are challenging the sexual status quo from Hollywood to corporate offices, pursuing power as seldom before. But there is one barrier yet to be toppled: Money. Of 2,043 billionaires on the latest annual Forbes tally, 227 are women; most of that small group inherited their wealth.”

Chira bemoans the fact that there are not enough very wealthy women to influence (or buy up) the political process. She reproduces approvingly the comment of Alicia Glen, New York’s deputy mayor for housing and economic development, a former managing director at Goldman Sachs, “that if you’re the richest person on the planet, there’s no waiting you out.”

The *Times* correspondent further expresses the concern that “many women, those who grew up wealthy and those who did not, have long been steered away from the unapologetic drive for wealth.”

She cites a scene from the 2016 film *Equity*, in which one character “states baldly, ‘I like money,’” and continues, “It was a jaw-dropping moment because such portrayals are so rare—and that void is one that Sarah Megan Thomas, one of the film’s writers, stars and producers, set out to fill, with financial backing from a group of Wall Street women. ‘We don’t show strong women liking money on screen,’ she said.”

Chira’s piece describes, with a certain degree of sorrow or bitterness, what the author considers the obstacles that remain in the path of women pursuing “money and clout just the way men do,” but concludes,

on an optimistic note, “more women appear to be awakening to the power wealth can endow.”

That the *Times* carries this open appeal for women to be single-mindedly greedy and power-hungry, to spurn compassion and caring, and identifies this with feminism generally and the #MeToo movement in particular has a certain significance. Chira’s refreshing honesty sets in helpful relief the innumerable spurious claims to the effect that the ongoing sexual misconduct campaign has a left-wing character, that it concerns “sexual harassment in the capitalist workplace,” that it is a mass movement led by working women, etc.

We have argued on the *World Socialist Web Site* that the ongoing sexual witch hunt has nothing to do with improving the conditions of working-class women. A layer of affluent women are cynically attempting to use the existence of genuine abuse and past injustice to improve their own bargaining power and their own positions within the existing economic system. Insofar as this group of bourgeois women win concessions and more power and privileges for themselves, it will make them more directly into exploiters of the working class and *further* increase the divide between women along class lines.

Under certain circumstances, however, those who are leading the #MeToo and related movements require a type of politically legitimizing cover story. It can be awkward, and even embarrassing, to appear before the public and declare: “To be honest, we are doing this entirely for ourselves. We are conducting this campaign so we can become producers and studio executives, and run large companies. We too ‘like money.’ Please, help us become even richer than we are!”

Such an effort needs the *Times* and *Washington Post* editorial boards, the *Nation*, the *Socialist Worker* (i.e., “The #MeToo campaign has allowed tens of thousands

of women to step into the space opened up by high-profile women in Hollywood to speak about their own experience of sexual assault and harassment on the job”) and the rest of the liberal and “left” media to provide them with arguments and alibis.

Indeed, as far as the pseudo-left goes, it is largely to present a machine for providing a “progressive” gloss to profoundly reactionary movements and operations.

The comment in Sunday’s edition of the *Times* cuts through a lot of this. Chira has a lengthy history at the newspaper, where she started working in 1981. She has been the foreign news editor, the assistant managing editor for news and a deputy executive editor overseeing the *Times*’ entire news reporting.

She speaks unashamedly for a social layer that has emerged and enriched itself rapidly in the past several decades. Women in the US earned 2.6 percent of professional degrees in 1961; in 2008, that figure had risen to 52 percent. Women now graduate from law school in roughly the same numbers as men. They make up just under half of medical residents and fellows, or medical-school graduates in training, according to the American Medical Association. They earn more than 44 percent of master’s degrees in business and management, including 37 percent of MBAs.

As one commentator has observed, “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.”

A 2011 study noted that “inequality in educational attainment has risen more sharply among women than among men. This is driven by rapid increases among women from upper-income families, who have pulled away from other women, and all men, in their educational attainment.”

In sum, a layer of women has separated itself out dramatically and decisively from the millions of working-class women, many of them trapped in some of the lowest-paying jobs: cashiers, childcare workers, maids and housekeeping cleaners, waitresses, personal care aides, nursing, psychiatric and home health aides, teacher assistants, receptionists, secretaries, etc. This rapid change and differentiation has also shaped the consciousness of this social grouping, encouraging its indifference to poverty and economic suffering and its hostility toward those “below.”

A good many affluent women are a little tired of pretending there is anything radical or subversive about feminism, or that there needs to be.

In certain instances, these women are carrying out attacks on males in their professions, and the campaign over sexual misconduct is one of the weapons, to take over their places in business, in the media, at universities. The working class will not gain anything by this. If there were an additional 1,816 female billionaires, would the world be any more of a paradise for the vast majority of women and men?

Socialists have long recognized that the struggle of feminists and bourgeois women generally for privileges has this reactionary character. The comment by Russian socialist Alexandra Kollontai in 1909, for example, reflected a widely held view: “The feminists see men as the main enemy, for men have unjustly seized all rights and privileges for themselves, leaving women only chains and duties. For them a victory is won when a prerogative previously enjoyed exclusively by the male sex is conceded to the ‘fair sex.’ Proletarian women have a different attitude. They do not see men as the enemy and the oppressor; on the contrary, they think of men as their comrades, who share with them the drudgery of the daily round and fight with them for a better future.”

This is our attitude too.



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