

#MeToo at the Cannes Film Festival: All about money and power

Stefan Steinberg**21 May 2018**

Following interventions at the 2018 Oscars, Baftas (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) and Berlin film festival, promoters of the selfish #MeToo movement shifted their attention last week to the Cannes Film Festival.

The sexual witch hunt commenced after journalist Ronan Farrow and others published allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein last October. Weinstein was a frequent visitor to the Cannes festival and #MeToo advocates used this fact to promote their campaign. Supporters of the campaign handed out 40,000 flyers to festival guests warning that sexual harassment can be punished in France by three years in prison and a £40,000 (\$US 54,000) fine. The festival leadership also announced it was setting up a hotline for women to complain of any incidents of sexual abuse at the festival.

In the course of the festival, however, it became clear that the priority for #MeToo and its wealthy backers in Cannes had less to do with deterring sexual abuse and much more to do with advancing their own careers and bank balances.

On May 11 Australian actress Cate Blanchett, who heads the jury at the film festival, led a red carpet protest march by 82 actresses, female producers and directors, including Salma Hayek and Kristen Stewart, to demand equal pay and an end to sexual harassment.

Addressing the aims of the protest Blanchett said: "We demand that our workplaces are diverse and equitable so they can best reflect the world in which we live." But the "world in which we live" is dominated by social divisions, not gender issues. There is not the slightest indication that the stronger presence of upper middle class women in filmmaking has led to any widening of cinema's scope.

According to *Forbes* magazine, Blanchett earned \$12

million in 2017, placing her eighth in the league of highest earning actresses for that year. One can safely assume that the circles inhabited by multi-millionaire Blanchett have nothing in common with the lives of working women throughout the world.

One day after the red carpet protest, the French gender-parity group 50/50 by 2020 held a meeting at the festival. On its web site, 50-50-2020 notes that "While French cinema wasn't shaken by the Weinstein shock wave, it is essential that we move to take concrete action reaching beyond the issue of sexual abuse alone." The organisation's proposals for concrete action are all aimed at increasing the power and income of women in the film industry.

The Cannes meeting was chaired by another leading advocate of #MeToo, Melissa Silverstein, founder of "Women and Hollywood." A few years ago Silverstein complained about the fact that a man had been selected to make a film about Democratic Party presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Silverstein declared at the time: "Hiring a guy to direct the movie about the woman who is working her ass off to put more women in leadership positions around the world is a gigantic slap to everyone working on gender equity issues." That Clinton is a warmonger in the pocket of Wall Street does not trouble Silverstein.

One of the principal speakers at the 50-50-2020 Cannes meeting was University of Southern California Annenberg professor Stacy L. Smith, who told those assembled that efforts to affect change in the film industry must concentrate on finance. "We're going after tax incentives at the state and federal level to link [them] to production credits so that if a production has the inclusion rider attached to it, it should move to the front of the line or automatically qualify for funding."

Smith is regarded as the initiator of the inclusion rider

whereby actors and filmmakers insist on contracts requiring a crew selected on the basis of gender, race, and/or sexual orientation. The inclusion rider was the main demand raised by actress Frances McDormand in her speech at the 2018 Oscars.

Already at the Berlin film festival, a plethora of organisations, including Speak Up, Pro Quote, Time's Up, etc., held meetings demanding so-called "Gender Monitoring", i.e. the vetting of film roles, according to gender. For the first time, the press statement released before the start of the Berlin festival contained a detailed breakdown of films according to the gender of the filmmaker. Selection according to gender or sexual orientation has long been a policy for certain sections of the Berlin festival. Now it has become official festival policy.

Some of the advocates of gender monitoring and inclusion riders argue that the result of such policies will be more female directors and therefore better films. Filmmaker and actress Whitney Cummings writes on her web page: "An inclusion rider is something actors put into their contracts to ensure gender and racial equality in hiring on movie sets. We should support this for a billion reasons, but if you can't find a reason to, here's one: it will make movies better."

The fact is that male and female filmmakers in America and across the globe are subject to the same social and political pressures in what is a generally hostile ideological climate. An examination of recent movies by prominent women filmmakers reveal that they share the problems of their male counterparts and are quite capable of churning out similarly execrable material.

This is confirmed by a brief review of the work of female directors dealt with on this web site. Writing on the CIA's favourite director, Kathryn Bigelow, we described her film *Zero Dark Thirty* as a "semi-fascistic cinematic embrace of the US military-intelligence apparatus and its crimes." And furthermore, Bigelow's work was "shameful. At nearly two hours, the film is long, dark and boring. Not a single character is developed."

Referring to the film *Wonder Woman*, directed by Patty Jenkins and praised as a breakthrough for female directors, we wrote that "*Wonder Woman* is a trite, often tedious, special effects-laden film."

And just recently, in regard to British filmmaker

Lynne Ramsey's *You Were Never Really Here*, the WSWS commented: "This is a terrible, marketably violent film that sheds no light whatsoever on its ostensible subject matter or characters ... Here she confirms her lack of interest or hostility to the coherent examination of social life. Ramsay seems to be offering herself—backed by a universally admiring media—as a female candidate for the Scorsese-Tarantino school of perverse, gratuitous and inexplicable brutality."

To their credit, some participants at the festival in Cannes have spoken out clearly against the Hollywood #MeToo witch hunters.

French-Polish director Roman Polanski, in Cannes with his new film, *Based On a True Story*, compared the campaign around #MeToo to a form of hypocritical "mass hysteria." He told *Newsweek Polska*: "I think this is the kind of mass hysteria that occurs in society from time to time."

Director Terry Gilliam, whose latest film *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* closed the festival in Cannes, recently compared the #MeToo movement to mob rule: "The mob is out there, they are carrying their torches and they are going to burn down Frankenstein's castle."

The Cannes experience demonstrates once again there is nothing democratic or progressive about the demand for gender or race quotas. These are maneuvers by already privileged middle class layers looking for more privileges.



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