

Ronan Farrow's latest #MeToo “bombshell,” directed against Leslie Moonves of CBS

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The *New Yorker* magazine has posted an article by Ronan Farrow detailing allegations of sexual misconduct against Leslie Moonves, the chairman, president and CEO of entertainment conglomerate CBS Corporation.

The piece also claims, more generally, that a “toxic” workplace culture exists at CBS, extending from Moonves, in Farrow’s words, “to important parts of the corporation, including CBS News and ‘60 Minutes,’ one of the network’s most esteemed programs.”

The lengthy piece includes claims by actress-writer Illeana Douglas, writer Janet Jones and producer Christine Peters, as well as those by several anonymous women, that Moonves made sexual advances toward them.

Summing up, Farrow writes, “Six women who had professional dealings with him told me that, between the nineteen-eighties and the late aughts, Moonves sexually harassed them. Four described forcible touching or kissing during business meetings, in what they said appeared to be a practiced routine. Two told me that Moonves physically intimidated them or threatened to derail their careers. All said that he became cold or hostile after they rejected his advances, and that they believed their careers suffered as a result.”

Aside from the accusations of the individuals, Farrow provides no evidence that the inappropriate or perhaps illegal actions took place.

Moonves is a powerful corporate executive. According to a compensation study by the Associated Press covering 339 executives at S&P 500 companies, he was the second-highest-paid CEO in the US in 2017, taking in \$68.4 million, unchanged from the year before.

Based on Farrow’s article, considerable pressure is being brought to bear on Moonves to step down at CBS, at least temporarily. He and his allies on the CBS board of directors are currently locked in a bitter battle with Shari Redstone of Viacom, the daughter of mogul Sumner Redstone. Viacom purchased and absorbed CBS in 2000, but Sumner Redstone subsequently re-divided the corporation into two separate firms in 2006, at which point Moonves became CEO of the once again independent CBS. Shari Redstone has been attempting to re-merge CBS and Viacom, a move fiercely resisted by Moonves. The two parties filed suit against one another in May.

As a result in part of the uncertainty over Moonves’s future, CBS’ stock price fell by 6 percent on July 27 and by another five percent on July 30. CBS has so far refused to suspend Moonves.

Instead, it has hired a law firm to conduct an investigation into the allegations.

A great deal of money is at stake (Moonves alone stands to lose a severance package worth an estimated \$150 million if fired for cause), along with control of CBS—the world’s fifth largest entertainment company, after NBCUniversal, The Walt Disney Company, WarnerMedia and 21st Century Fox (the last named is about to be swallowed up by Disney).

A ruthless businessman, Moonves presides over and benefits from the exploitation of CBS employees. He makes almost 2,000 times what a sales assistant at CBS earns and 1,300 times the salary of a CBS account executive.

However, Farrow’s article is a travesty. It has nothing in common with a left-wing critique of CBS, one of the handful of privately owned firms that exercises a stranglehold over news and entertainment in America. The *New Yorker* piece—and the #MeToo campaign as a whole—is a diversion from the struggle against social inequality, in the interests of a privileged, already wealthy layer doing battle for even greater privilege and wealth.

This is the top 7 or 8 percent of the richest in America doing battle with the top 1 percent. This helps account for the self-pitying and unconvincing character of Farrow’s latest “bombshell.”

In fact, there is very little substance to the *New Yorker* article. The principal testimony comes from Douglas, the grand-daughter of actor Melvyn Douglas. She alleges that in March 1997 Moonves summoned her to his office to discuss her role in a comedy series CBS was considering. Douglas claims the CBS executive grabbed and pinned her down. Farrow writes: “She recalled lying limp and unresponsive beneath him. ‘You sort of black out,’ she told me. ‘You think, How long is this going to go on? I was just looking at this nice picture of his family and his kids. I couldn’t get him off me.’”

Douglas alleges that it was “only when Moonves, aroused, pulled up her skirt and began to thrust against her that her fear overcame her paralysis. She told herself that she had to do something to stop him.” The actress claims she was able to joke her way out of the situation (allegedly telling Moonves, “Yes, for the head of a network you’re some good kisser”), but not before the CEO followed her and blocked her path, demanding to know, “We’re going to keep this between you and me, right?”

Douglas asserts she was then dropped by Moonves and CBS in retaliation for her rejection of his advances.

The incident recounted by writer Janet Jones occurred in 1985. She claims Moonves made a pass at her in his office, which she was able to rebuff. Jones alleges that Moonves threatened to destroy her writing career if she reported the incident. Producer Christine Peters asserts that Moonves came on to her during a meeting in 2006, putting a hand up her skirt.

There is no way of knowing whether Douglas, Jones and Peters are telling the truth. None of them filed a complaint with the police, although they now say they considered doing so.

CBS said that Moonves acknowledges trying to kiss Douglas, but “denies any characterization of ‘sexual assault,’ intimidation, or retaliatory action,” including personally firing her from the proposed CBS comedy. The executive, according to CBS, has no recollection of the interactions with Jones and categorically denies any alleged touching or inappropriate conduct during the meeting with Peters.

It is possible the three women are telling the truth, along with the unnamed individuals. It is also possible that, in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein scandal, various embittered actresses and others, whose careers have not prospered, feel that the moment has arrived in which they can get their own back at the industry and Moonves in particular for perceived injustices.

The *New Yorker* piece is scandal-mongering at its worst. Farrow’s methods are shabby and dishonest. There are no facts corroborating the various claims. Unsubstantiated accusations, anonymous allegations, gossip, rumor and vindictiveness are his stock in trade. He constructs his articles with the minimum of proof and a maximum of innuendo to exert influence on an upper middle class readership only too willing and eager to accept his every sensationalized pronouncement. The individual target is tried, found guilty and condemned by the moralizing, sanctimonious Farrow.

The women here are simply to be “believed.” So were the accusers in Salem in 1692. This is the further undermining of the right to due process, a right won in bloody struggles against oppression in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, including the American Revolution and Civil War. Punishment is demanded, as we have previously noted on the WSWS, when it is not clear that any crime has been committed.

A ferocious conflict is taking place in the entertainment industry, the media and academia between established, longtime figures like Moonves and minority and female layers determined to force them out and replace them. *Variety* notes that, if Moonves steps aside, “Other candidates who might be tapped in an emergency situation include CBS alums Nancy Tellem and Nina Tassler.” The working class has no stake in this unprincipled, internecine warfare in which nothing is too dirty or underhanded.

In reference to the conflict between Moonves and Shari Redstone, Farrow blandly assures his readers that “All of the women making allegations against Moonves began speaking to me before the current lawsuits [filed in May 2018], in independent interviews carried out during the past eight months. All said that they were not motivated by any allegiance in the corporate battle.” The public conflict between Moonves and Redstone has been going on for at least *two years*, since the latter first tried unsuccessfully to force a merger of Viacom and CBS in December

2016. It may be that none of the accusers has any allegiance in the corporate battle, but what about those behind the scenes who might be egging them on?

And, in any event, why should Farrow have the slightest credibility about any of this—this protégé of the late imperialist diplomat Richard Holbrooke (up to his neck in blood from Vietnam to the Balkans to Afghanistan) and former State Department propagandist?

In his book, *War on Peace: The End of Diplomacy and the Decline of American Influence* (2018), Farrow recounts his experiences as a special advisor to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton under the Obama administration. Farrow notes that in 2012 he was present in Tunisia when Clinton delivered “a speech about democracy in the region. After Richard Holbrooke’s death, I had put together a small team of Foreign Service officers to focus on the global implications of the youth unrest I’d seen vividly in Afghanistan and that then unfolded across North Africa and the Middle East. That February in Tunisia, Clinton was announcing my role as part of an initiative focused on youth outreach and public diplomacy.” In other words, Farrow was a professional liar on behalf of American imperialist interests and part of the conspiracy against the oppressed masses in North Africa and the Middle East.

After a hiatus of a few years, following Clinton’s departure from the administration, Farrow moved from his US government post to the post of prosecutor-in-chief of the #MeToo campaign. He, the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times* (which was apparently investigating Moonves earlier this year) and important sections of the media are relentlessly pursuing their identity politics agenda.

In addition to its role in promoting the economic interests of a definite social layer and further damaging democratic rights, the sexual harassment campaign is an effort to blunt *class* feeling and *class* hatred, promote divisions between men and women and, to whatever extent possible, hinder the development of the independent political movement of the working class.



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