

Ronan Farrow's #MeToo campaign brings down Leslie Moonves at CBS

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The CBS Corporation this week announced the departure of its chairman and chief executive, Leslie Moonves. The announcement immediately followed the publication online of a second article by Ronan Farrow in the *New Yorker* detailing charges of sexual misconduct against the entertainment mogul.

In response to Farrow's first article, posted on July 27, CBS initiated an inquiry, to be conducted by two prominent law firms, into the specific claims as well as the "workplace culture" at the firm.

The second article, posted September 9, includes six additional charges dating from the 1980s to the early 2000s. While the inquiry continues, Moonves has departed. He reportedly is due to receive up to \$120 million in severance pay, but this could be reduced to zero depending on the outcome of the internal investigation. Replacing him on an interim basis is Joseph Ianniello, the current chief operating officer of CBS. The 13-member board of the company has been revamped, with six departures and six new members.

Moonves, one of the most powerful figures in Hollywood, has been at CBS for 23 years, the last 15 as chairman and chief executive. This tenure, unusually long for the cutthroat entertainment industry, is attributable to the formulas for profit-making programming and licensing fees that Moonves has successfully implemented. CBS is the world's fifth largest entertainment company, with annual profits of about \$13 billion.

Moonves, 68, is one the wealthiest figures in the industry, with compensation last year of \$69.3 million. He is the beneficiary of truly obscene pay packages amounting to more than \$1 billion between 2006 and 2017. Figures for 2016 show that Moonves was the second-highest-paid CEO in the US that year.

The latest *New Yorker* article consists almost entirely of salacious and graphic details of claims that Moonves

forced himself sexually on the six women involved. The allegations, stretching back more than 30 years, are being made now, according to the women involved, because the #MeToo campaign has given them the courage to come forward.

Phyllis Golden-Gottlieb, a retired television executive who is now in her early 80s, and Jessica Pallington, a writer, both told Farrow that Moonves had coerced them into oral sex decades ago, in incidents that predated his time at CBS. Golden-Gottlieb's testimony dates back to the 1980s, when she and Moonves both worked for the Lorimar-Telepictures production company. She continued to work for him for a period after the incident. Pallington's claim dates from the 1990s, when she worked briefly as his assistant at Warner Brothers Television.

Moonves issued a statement declaring, "The appalling accusations in this article are untrue. What is true is that I had consensual relations with three of the women some 25 years ago before I came to CBS. And I have never used my position to hinder the advancement or careers of women. In my 40 years of work, I have never before heard of such disturbing accusations. I can only surmise they are surfacing now for the first time, decades later, as part of a concerted effort by others to destroy my name, my reputation, and my career. Anyone who knows me knows that the person described in this article is not me."

Neither the allegations nor Moonves's denials can be taken as proof. It is possible that at least some of the charges against him are true. He has long had the reputation of a bully, a man with a hair-trigger temper, in the words of the *Wall Street Journal*. And testimony on that score comes not only from women. "He is the most vengeful vindictive man in a vengeful vindictive town," Andy Hill, a former CBS programming executive, is quoted as saying in the *Journal*.

Whatever Moonves may be guilty of, however,

Farrow's articles, like his original piece on mogul Harvey Weinstein a year ago, have nothing to do with a genuine exposure of capitalist exploitation and the media monopolies that dictate what the population sees and hears on television and elsewhere. They are instead part of an internal war in which wealthy upper-middle-class layers seek to use the weapon of identity politics to advance their own positions or extract revenge and payback.

A more immediate and very likely crucial element in the campaign to remove Moonves is the raging faction fight for control of the board of CBS in the past period. Shari Redstone, the president of National Amusements, who, with her father, the ailing 95-year-old Sumner Redstone, controls the majority of voting shares of CBS, has been pushing for several years for a merger between the company and the Viacom cable company. Moonves opposed this move.

Last spring, CBS sued Redstone and her National Amusements company over the matter. In January of this year, Redstone called Moonves and others to inquire about a sexual harassment complaint that had been lodged against the CEO with the Los Angeles Police Department, one that was eventually dropped because it exceeded the statute of limitations. It was suggested that Ms. Redstone was spreading rumors for her own business purposes, and her faction certainly had a motive in going after Moonves on the sexual misconduct charges.

The settlement announced by CBS just days ago apparently gives Redstone all she was looking for. The *Los Angeles Times* headlined the news, "With Leslie Moonves out, Shari Redstone emerges winner in fight over control of CBS." The lawsuit against Redstone has been dropped. As the *Wall Street Journal* put it, "Ms. Redstone emerges with much of what she wanted after the bruising fights. She will retain her family's voting control; she was able to select six new independent directors for CBS's board, fulfilling a longstanding goal of injecting new blood into the governing body; and she removes Mr. Moonves, her main antagonist, who had resisted a merger of CBS and Viacom. She also agreed, however, not to press for a merger for at least two years."

With the ongoing #MeToo campaign, Moonves follows such multimillionaire figures as Charlie Rose, Matt Lauer, Roger Ailes and Bill O'Reilly in falling victim to bitter battles, especially in the media and the entertainment industries, between an "old guard" and those who use racial and gender politics for the purposes of personal power and advancement.

Ronan Farrow's recent articles are no doubt also aimed at bolstering the "movement" that he helped to launch nearly a year ago in the face of several recent reverses, such as the revelation that Italian actress Asia Argento, one of the main accusers of Harvey Weinstein, had herself paid off a young man who accused her of sexual abuse. This illustrated not only the hypocrisy of Argento, but also how easily the charge of sexual misconduct can be used in the current climate of sexual witch-hunting and hysteria.

There are definite signs that broad sections of the population are losing patience with the #MeToo media frenzy orchestrated by Farrow and such outlets as the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*. The campaign, characterized by a "verdict first, trial later" mentality, has already cost the careers of various well-known figures who were not even accused of anything more than inappropriate conduct.

Farrow himself, who has been anointed chief prosecutor in this campaign, brings to his role two highly dubious credentials. As a well-connected young lawyer, he went to work at the State Department under Hillary Clinton, and counts the late imperialist diplomat Richard Holbrooke as one of his foremost mentors.

As the son of Mia Farrow and Woody Allen, he has led a truly vicious and widely discredited campaign accusing his father of the sexual abuse of his adopted seven-year-old daughter, a claim obsessively advanced by Mia Farrow in the wake of Allen's affair with Farrow's adopted daughter Soon-Yi Previn. Allen and Soon-Yi have now been married for decades and have two children of their own.

The #MeToo campaign adopts the neo-Puritan methods of the extreme right to advance the selfish interests of sections of the upper-middle class. At the same time it serves as a distraction and diversion from the class issues posed by inequality and workplace harassment of all kinds.



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