Senate Committee to take testimony on sex assault allegations against Judge Kavanaugh

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Amid saturation media coverage, the Senate Judiciary Committee and lawyers for Christine Blasey Ford agreed Sunday to go forward with an open hearing Thursday on Ford's allegations that Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her 36 years ago, when they were both teenagers in a Maryland suburb of Washington, DC.

The stage is thus set for a day of political theater that will do nothing to establish which of the two is telling the truth. Psychologist and Palo Alto University professor Ford claims that an inebriated 17-year-old Kavanaugh threw her on a bed during a house party when she was 15 and attempted to rape her. Kavanaugh denies that he was even at the party.

Ford's lawyers and the Republican-controlled committee reportedly agreed to have Ford testify first, followed by Kavanaugh. Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley rejected Ford's request for other witnesses to be called, including Kavanaugh's friend Mark Judge, whom, she claims, was present and complicit in the sexual attack, something Judge denies. Grassley also refused to allow her to respond at the hearing to Kavanaugh's testimony. Earlier, the Republicans rejected demands by Ford and the Democrats for an FBI investigation of her charges prior to a hearing.

In recent days, four people named by Ford as having been present at the house party where she was attacked, including Judge, have said they have no memory of the party or the alleged incident.

It is not clear whether the Republicans on the committee will question Ford directly, as she has requested, or have a committee staff lawyer, presumably a woman, do the questioning.

Only hours after the agreement with Ford was announced, a second allegation of sexual misconduct against Kavanaugh was unleashed by the *New Yorker* magazine's team of Ronan Farrow and Jane Mayer. They cited the account of 53-year-old Deborah Ramirez, who claims she encountered Kavanaugh at a dorm-room party on the Yale University campus where they were both drunk, and he exposed himself to her.

The *New Yorker* writers were unable to confirm Ramirez's account with any other witnesses, but they claimed Judiciary Committee aides had obtained the same information and tried to push through the nomination before it came out. "Senior Republican staffers also learned of the allegation last week," they wrote. "Soon after, Senate Republicans issued renewed calls to accelerate the timing of a committee vote."

The media circus surrounding Ford's charges—soon to be amplified by those of Ramirez—is the latest stage in the ongoing political warfare between two reactionary factions of the American ruling oligarchy. President Trump, backed by the bulk of the Republican Party and certain major media outlets such as Rupert Murdoch's *Wall Street Journal* and Fox News, is seeking to foster a fascistic base for extreme nationalist, militarist and authoritarian policies, using anti-immigrant racism as his primary tactic.

The Democrats are no less militaristic, opposing Trump from the standpoint that he is insufficiently aggressive in confronting Russia and escalating the war in Syria. Backed by publications such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and most of the television and cable networks, they are aligned with the dominant factions of the military/intelligence apparatus and are presenting themselves as the loyal defenders of the CIA, the FBI and the anti-Russia investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

Moreover, in the name of combating "Russian meddling" in US politics and "fake news," the Democrats are spearheading a campaign of internet censorship directed against left wing, anti-war and socialist publications and organizations.

The Democrats have made a calculated decision to make Ford's sexual allegations the focus not only of their opposition to the confirmation of Kavanaugh, but also of their campaign for the November congressional elections. They, and the major media outlets allied with them in opposition to Trump, have increasingly linked Ford's allegations to the nearly year-old #MeToo sexual witch hunt. This reactionary exercise in identity politics has been used to undermine basic democratic principles such as due process and the presumption of innocence.

Both the print media and the Sunday talk shows were dominated by the sexual abuse allegations against Kavanaugh. Two of the three commentaries on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* dealt with the Kavanaugh allegations, and the front page of the "Sunday Review" section featured a hysterical rant in which the author wrote: "It's one thing to say #MeToo, but if I find out it's them, too, I can picture myself hunting down

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the man who hurt them and dismembering him with my fingernails and burning the whole world down."

The *Washington Post* 's opinion section was devoted entirely to a six-page essay on Amber Wyatt, who in 2006, at the age of 16, reported that she had been raped in her home town of Arlington, Texas, and was ignored by the authorities.

On NBC's "Meet the Press" program, moderator Chuck Todd asked Democratic Senator Patty Murray of Washington state to respond to an ad being broadcast by the Democratic-aligned Demand Justice group. The ad presents Ford's story as fact rather than allegation and essentially accuses the Republicans of being defenders of rape and sexual assault.

In an example of Orwellian "Newspeak," Murray cited the #MeToo campaign and replied: "So I think it's really important, in this time, in this day, that we recognize when women speak out, that we should presume that they are innocent … It should be a presumption of innocence and then have a fair process to go through to determine the truth."

In other words, the "presumption of innocence" means that the accuser, if a woman, must be assumed to be telling the truth and the accused must be assumed to be guilty, unless he can prove otherwise—a complete inversion of the democratic principle of presumption of innocence, but entirely in line with the methods of the Salem witch trials.

Dick Durbin of Illinois, the second-ranking Democrat in the Senate, interviewed on ABC television's "This Week" program, made clear that the top priority for his party is not to block the arch-reactionary Kavanaugh from joining the four other far-right justices on the Supreme Court, but rather to use the sex scandal surrounding him for electoral purposes.

Host George Stephanopoulos showed a clip of Democratic Congressman Eric Swalwell threatening to launch judicial impeachment proceedings against Kavanaugh should he be confirmed and installed on the court. Asked by Stephanopoulos if he agreed with this proposal, Durbin declared emphatically, "No, I don't."

On some of the same talk shows, US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made war-mongering threats against Iran and Russia in advance of Trump's appearance at this week's UN General Assembly meeting. On "Meet the Press," Pompeo threatened military action against Russia in the event of a new alleged chemical attack by the Syrian regime against US-backed Al-Qaeda-linked "rebels."

The following exchange took place:

Chuck Todd: If Assad uses chemical weapons, are you going to hold Russia accountable for this?"

Pompeo: "The president is very clear. We will go to the source of the bad behavior…"

Chuck Todd: "Are we afraid to use—have we ruled out using a military response, if we see something like that?"

Pompeo: "We're not going to rule out a single thing, Chuck."

This chilling exchange was not mentioned on the evening news programs or by Democratic Party spokespeople.

The Kavanaugh sex scandal is being used by the Democrats to disorient public opinion and divert attention from the basic class issues—social inequality, poverty, attacks on health care and education, attacks on democratic rights and immigrants—that are driving rising anger and resistance among workers and young people as well as opposition to capitalism and interest in socialism. The Democrats mounted no serious opposition to Kavanaugh on the basis of his right-wing record and positions—his role in drafting the torture policies of the Bush administration, his participation in the Clinton impeachment drive, his far-right positions on abortion rights, business regulation and executive powers.

In seeking now to make sexual abuse allegations the centerpiece of their campaign in the fall elections, the Democrats are continuing the tactics Hillary Clinton employed against Trump in the 2016 presidential election. Clinton, running as the chosen candidate of the intelligence establishment and Wall Street, disparaged working class Trump supporters as "deplorables," avoided attacking him on his right-wing policies, and sought to mobilize wealthy upper-middle class layers by focusing on charges of sexual harassment following the release of the "Access Hollywood" tape.

The use of sexual allegations to manipulate public opinion has reached a new stage in the #MeToo operation. By means of this campaign and identity politics more generally, the Democrats are seeking to conceal their agreement in all essentials with the right-wing program of austerity, war and authoritarianism of Trump and the Republicans, disorient popular consciousness and divide the working class along gender and race lines.

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