

The Kavanaugh hearing: A spectacle of political filth and reaction

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The day-long, nationally televised hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, devoted to allegations of sexual assault against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, was an exercise in political degradation.

The Democratic Party has chosen to wage its campaign against the nomination of Kavanaugh on the most right-wing basis possible. Rather than focus public attention on Kavanaugh's ultra-right political views—his opposition to abortion rights, his rubber-stamping of police violence, his consistent defense of corporate interests against workers and consumers—or on his lengthy record as a partisan legal thug going back to the Clinton impeachment, the Democrats engineered a hearing in which all attention was focused on Kavanaugh's personal conduct as a teenager.

Six broadcast and cable networks provided all-day coverage, even pre-empting their own evening news programs when the hearing ran past 6:30 p.m. Eastern Time. The national television audience was subjected to hour after hour of “grilling” by Democrats on such matters as references to flatulence and vomiting in Kavanaugh's high school year book, whether Kavanaugh and his high school classmates drank beer on weeknights, and the meaning of obscure entries in a day-to-day calendar kept by a 17-year-old boy.

Perhaps the low point came when Senate Judiciary Committee lawyer Rachel Mitchell—brought in for the day to serve as an “expert” questioner so that Republican senators wouldn't be seen as bullies of Kavanaugh's accuser, Christine Blasey Ford—took Judge Kavanaugh through a carefully worded denial that he had ever exposed himself or placed his penis next to a Yale woman classmate's face while they were both drunk at a party.

What has any of this to do with the social and political issues confronting tens of millions of working people in the United States? How does the obsessive focus on the 36-year-old actions of a teenage boy in any way advance the struggle against the reactionary politics of Judge Kavanaugh and President Trump today?

Those who defend the #MeToo-style campaign against Kavanaugh will have no second act if they succeed in blocking the nomination. Trump will simply replace the nominee with an equally reactionary jurist—perhaps a woman—or one like his first

Supreme Court pick, Neil Gorsuch, who was easily confirmed last year, with some Democratic votes in the Senate, despite a record of political reaction virtually identical to Kavanaugh's.

The Democratic Party's decision to focus exclusively on Kavanaugh's alleged sexual misconduct, to the exclusion of his politics, was a deliberate political choice. It was the senior Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, Dianne Feinstein of California, who held back the allegation by Blasey Ford until after it was clear that Kavanaugh would likely be confirmed otherwise.

The charges were then leaked to the press, undoubtedly via the Democratic Party, using journalistic mouthpieces like Ronan Farrow, the former State Department official who has become the spearhead of the #MeToo campaign in Hollywood and Washington. These leaks in turn forced Blasey Ford to come forward publicly, against her own wishes.

In her testimony, Ford forcefully accused Kavanaugh of carrying out a sexual assault on her at a party in 1982, aided by a second boy, Mark Judge. Kavanaugh made an equally forceful denial. He repeatedly cited statements from individuals who were said to be at the party, including a friend of Ford's, that they recalled no such party taking place.

Thursday's hearing demonstrated the deeply reactionary and anti-democratic character of the #MeToo campaign, as Democrats suggested they believed Blasey Ford even before hearing Kavanaugh's testimony. The commentary in the media followed suit, proceeding from the assumption that Ford's allegations were undeniably true. CNN legal analyst Jeffrey Toobin declared, that “just the idea that anyone could consider this [to be] false testimony” was outrageous.

The WSWS takes no position on the truth or falsity of the allegations. However, Blasey Ford presented no corroborating evidence beyond her own memory, nor was she asked to do so by the Democratic senators. From a legal standpoint, there were significant gaps in her account. This allowed Republicans like Lindsey Graham and John Cornyn, defenders of torture and police murders, to posture as advocates of democratic principles like the presumption of innocence, and to proclaim that America was not a police state.

The Supreme Court nominee had clearly been told that he had to launch an aggressive counter-attack in his opening statement,

if only to reassure Trump, who had suggested at a press conference Wednesday that he might be swayed if Blasey Ford's testimony was effective.

After stating that Blasey Ford may have been the victim of a sexual assault, just not by himself, Kavanaugh launched a frontal assault on Senate Democrats, a much easier and less sympathetic target than Blasey Ford. His opening statement included a historically unprecedented political diatribe for a nominee seeking the highest judicial position in America, a position supposedly "above politics" or requiring at least a formal disavowal of direct partisan interests.

He denounced "a frenzy on the left" to block his nomination, cited the statement by Democratic Senate leader Charles Schumer that he would "oppose me with everything he's got," noted that another Democratic senator had "referred to me as 'evil'." He denounced "Another Democratic senator on this committee" and "a former head of the Democratic National Committee" for their public attacks on his nomination.

But even this open demonstration of his political standpoint as an ultra-right Republican did not evoke any significant protest from the committee Democrats. There were one or two references to Kavanaugh's partisan diatribe, but not a single Democrat pointed to the statement as a virtual self-disqualification of the nominee as an impartial and politically "neutral" jurist, revealing him as a political hatchet-man for the extreme right.

That is in large measure because the real purpose in focusing on the sexual misconduct charges against Kavanaugh is not to defeat the nomination, but to shift the axis of official American politics even further to the right, both in the November 6 elections and beyond.

The Democratic Party has based its supposed opposition to Trump not on his reactionary attacks on democratic rights, particularly in relation to immigrants, or his tax cuts for the wealthy, or his embrace of militarism and war, but on claims that Trump is too soft on Russia. The anti-Russia campaign, an attempt to attack Trump from the right, has failed to gain any significant public support.

Supplementing the anti-Russia campaign is the raising of sexual allegations against Republican Party officeholders, including Trump himself. This was effective in defeating the Republican Senate candidate in Alabama, Roy Moore, and is now being utilized against Trump's second Supreme Court nominee. Whether or not Kavanaugh is placed on the court, the Democrats calculate they will appeal to their upper-middle-class social base.

A particularly remarkable moment in the hearing came in Kavanaugh's opening statement, when he declared, "This whole two-week effort has been a calculated and orchestrated political hit fueled with apparent pent-up anger about President Trump and the 2016 election, fear that has been unfairly stoked about my judicial record, revenge on behalf of the Clintons, and millions of dollars and money from outside left-wing

opposition groups."

Kavanaugh seized the opportunity provided by the Democrats to portray himself as the victim of a left-wing crusade. In fact, there is nothing left-wing about either the use of sexual allegations to discredit an opponent, or the claim that all victims must be believed regardless of evidence. The Democrats are embracing the arguments that were traditionally those of the extreme right.

The reference to "revenge on behalf of the Clintons" was revealing in this regard. Kavanaugh was making reference to his own role in the Kenneth Starr investigation into President Bill Clinton, when the future Supreme Court nominee drafted the bulk of the report which provided graphic details of Clinton's sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, a milestone in the degradation of political life in America, which reached a new low point yesterday.

Almost exactly 20 years ago, the *World Socialist Web Site* commented as follows on the Starr document:

"The process of investigating Clinton's sex life is not only degrading, but inherently intimidating. If a president of the United States, supposedly the most politically powerful officeholder in the country, can be persecuted in this fashion, what can ordinary citizens expect if they come into conflict with the state?

"It might appear odd that it is left to socialists, who oppose Clinton on his economic, social and foreign policies, to remind our audience of what the US political establishment has abandoned: elementary precepts of bourgeois law, due process and democratic rights."

The same thing could be said today in relation to Kavanaugh. There is no call for rejoicing that the author of the Starr report has now been hoisted on his own petard. It is necessary to understand the historical logic of this process.

Under conditions of mounting radicalization in the working class, expressed in the outbreak of powerful statewide teachers strikes, unanimous strike votes by steel and other industrial workers, and open support for socialism voiced by growing numbers of workers and a majority of young people, the two capitalist parties have definite class reasons to fear any open discussion of policies, domestic or foreign.

Accordingly, they are compelled to fight out their differences through the methods of backroom conspiracy and mudslinging of the filthiest description, seeking to pollute public consciousness and block any political intervention from below.



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