The New York Times exposes journalist, #MeToo crusader Ronan Farrow as a dishonest fraud

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In a lengthy article published May 17 ("Is Ronan Farrow Too Good to Be True?"), *New York Times* media columnist Ben Smith launched a sharp attack on journalist Ronan Farrow, revealing him to be a dishonest, manipulative journalist and a fraud.

Farrow has been the golden boy of the American media since the publication of his supposed exposé of Harvey Weinstein in the *New Yorker* in October 2017. Smith demonstrates that Farrow plays fast and loose with the truth, omitting "complicating facts and inconvenient details."

The 2017 Weinstein story, published almost simultaneously with the *Times*'s own piece on the Hollywood producer and his alleged wrongdoings, helped launch the #MeToo sexual misconduct campaign. As a result, in part, of Farrow's "pioneering" efforts, dozens of lives and careers have subsequently been destroyed.

Farrow went on from the Weinstein *New Yorker* feature to publish or collaborate on "bombshells" that brought down, among others, New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and Chairman and CEO of CBS Corporation Leslie Moonves, and fueled the effort to block the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the US Supreme Court. Parallel to all this has been his ongoing effort to destroy and blacklist his father, Woody Allen, including working to block the veteran filmmaker's autobiography from seeing the light of day.

It is impossible to know precisely why the *Times* has chosen to go after Farrow at this juncture, when the extent of his misconduct could have been investigated at any time over the past several years, but the decision cannot simply be an arbitrary or incidental one. No significant piece appears in that newspaper without fitting into and advancing a larger political agenda. Clearly, the famous wheel of retribution has turned.

It may be that the claim of sexual misconduct by Tara Reade against former Vice President Joe Biden was the straw that broke the camel's back. In that controversy, the #MeToo campaign and its slogan of "Believe women" cut across the plans and politics of the *Times* and the powerful sections of the American ruling elite for whom it speaks. Having benefited the Democratic Party and its constituency, Farrow and the sexual witch hunters may now be perceived, at least temporarily, as a hindrance: therefore, it's time to move on!

At any rate, the exposure and attempted burying of Farrow are revealing.

In his *Times* article, Smith examines Farrow's role in the cases of Weinstein, NBC anchor Matt Lauer and Michael Cohen, Donald Trump's personal lawyer. Additionally, Smith convincingly rebuts Farrow's contention that NBC conspired to suppress his reporting on Weinstein and that the Hillary Clinton camp sought to kill the same story.

In regard to Weinstein, who, with Farrow's assistance, was ultimately sentenced to a brutal 23 years in prison, Smith points to problems with the original October 2017 *New Yorker* feature.

One of the women interviewed by Farrow, Lucia Evans, claimed she was approached by Weinstein at a club, writes Smith, "and then later lured to his office with a promise of acting opportunities. There, she told Mr. Farrow, he forced her to perform oral sex on him." Smith observes that Farrow provided no corroboration for the claim, "a fundamental principle of the contemporary craft of reporting on sexual assault."

He continues: "A crucial witness, the friend who was with Ms. Evans when both women met Mr. Weinstein at the club, later told prosecutors that when a fact checker for the *New Yorker* called her about Mr. Farrow's story, she hadn't confirmed Ms. Evans's account of rape. Instead, according to a letter from prosecutors to defense lawyers, the witness told the magazine that 'something inappropriate happened,' and refused to go into detail."

Later, the friend told a New York City police detective that Evans had indicated the sexual encounter was consensual. The cop allegedly attempted to suppress this piece of evidence and when the witness's account emerged, the judge in the Weinstein case dismissed the charge.

In fact, Farrow's entire Weinstein feature story stank to high heaven. Along with Evans, another prominent source for the article was Asia Argento, who admitted that she "even grew close" to Weinstein, that he "dined with her, and introduced her to his mother... She said that she had consensual sexual relations with him multiple times over the course of the next five years." The rest of the article consisted of rumor, gossip and repeated allegations of Weinstein's boorishness and inappropriate behavior. There was very little of substance there.

Smith punctures one of Farrow's principal claims, one that looms large in his legend, that NBC executives caved in to Weinstein's threats to suppress the account of his alleged sexual predation, which Farrow was working on at the network. (After he left NBC, he took the story to the *New Yorker*.) The *Times* piece suggests that NBC executives, with good reason, thought the Weinstein story was weak and failed to meet "high … standards of proof."

Reviewing Farrow's journalistic efforts as a whole, Smith writes in the *Times:* "He [Farrow] delivers narratives that are irresistibly cinematic—with unmistakable heroes and villains—and often omits the complicating facts and inconvenient details that may make them less dramatic. At times, he does not always follow the typical journalistic imperatives of corroboration and rigorous disclosure, or he suggests conspiracies that are tantalizing but he cannot prove."

Smith bends over backward to give Farrow the benefit of the doubt, observing that the latter "is not a fabulist. His reporting can be misleading but he does not make things up. His work, though, reveals the weakness of a kind of resistance journalism that has thrived in the age of Donald Trump: That if reporters swim ably along with the tides of social media

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and produce damaging reporting about public figures most disliked by the loudest voices, the old rules of fairness and open-mindedness can seem more like impediments than essential journalistic imperatives."

Nonetheless, despite its relatively cautious and understated tone, the May 17 piece in the *Times* is devastating. It is, as *Vanity Fair* suggests, "a brutal portrayal" of Farrow. And one with broader implications. Smith writes, "The *New Yorker* has made Mr. Farrow a highly visible, generational star for its brand." But this "brand" is not simply the *New Yorker's*. Farrow has been at the heart of the #MeToo campaign since its inception, as its highest-profile journalistic mouthpiece.

For instance, when Farrow spoke at the University of Michigan in March 2019, where he received an award, he was introduced as a "groundbreaking" reporter whose work had set "the gold standard of sexual misconduct reporting" and had initiated "a tidal wave of societal change." His reporting, it was claimed, "unveiled the tools at the disposal of America's most powerful figures as they seek to silence their many victims." The audience was told that Farrow was combating "power structures and power imbalances" while "aggressively searching for the truth."

This was all nonsense, eagerly lapped up by his affluent audience. To cast serious doubt on his reporting is to cast doubt on the entire squalid, reactionary sexual witch-hunt and raise inevitable, penetrating questions about its larger purpose and evolution.

Smith and the *Times* proceed, of course, as though that newspaper itself did not bear a share of the responsibility for Farrow's undeserved reputation. One can peruse dozens and dozens of *Times* articles focused on Farrow without coming across a single skeptical or even searching passage. On the contrary, the content is almost always highly flattering. These are typical headlines in the *Times*: "Ronan Farrow to Develop an Investigative Series for HBO," "In 'Catch and Kill,' Ronan Farrow Recounts Chasing Harvey Weinstein Story," "Ronan Farrow Goes After NBC News Executives in His New Book," "I'll Go to My Grave Ranting About How Important Fact-Checkers Are [Farrow]," "Matt Lauer Accuser Speaks Out in Ronan Farrow's New Book," "Imagine This Were Your Sister,' Ronan Farrow Tells Woody Allen's Publisher," and so forth.

In April 2018, when the *New Yorker* (thanks to Farrow) and the *Times* shared the Pulitzer Prize for public service for their coverage of alleged sexual harassment and abuse in Hollywood and elsewhere, the *Times* never hinted at any problems with Farrow's methods. The prize, the *Times* wrote, "recognized investigations into the film mogul Harvey Weinstein, whose predations of women—and extensive efforts to cover up his behavior—were exposed in *The Times* by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, and in *The New Yorker* by Ronan Farrow."

The joint coverage of Weinstein, gloated the *Times*, "set off a cascade of testimonials from women about abuse in the workplace, whether at a Beverly Hills hotel or a Ford Motor plant in the Midwest. Famed personalities, including the comedian Louis C.K. and the chef Mario Batali, saw their careers derailed after women came forward with allegations of misconduct." Where were the references to Farrow's shabby, deceitful and self-promoting methods then?

In fact, Farrow wholly belongs with the rest of the media-celebrity trash produced by the past several decades of cultural and political degeneration in the US, a process that the *Times'* brand of journalism incarnates just as thoroughly.

Farrow's standard operating procedure as an "investigative journalist" consists of anonymous and unsubstantiated claims, sensationalism, half-truths, hints of dark secrets that are never spelled out and openly McCarthyite smear tactics. It is not accidental that Farrow began public life as a propagandist for US imperialist policy in the Middle East and Central Asia, where distortions and lies are a daily requirement. But this is the *Times* school of reporting as well, vetted or simply supplied by the CIA, the Pentagon and other state or corporate bodies.

While the liberal and pseudo-left media (*Jacobin*, the *Nation* and the late, unlamented *Socialist Worker*) accepted and endorsed Farrow's claims, the WSWS, proceeding on the basis of democratic principles, did not need to wait two-and-a-half years to see through him and his accomplices in the media.

As early as January 2018, we commented that Farrow personified "the nexus between middle class moralizing, the Democratic Party and high-level state operations... Farrow began working 'in some unspecified capacity' (*Politico*) for US diplomat (and Democrat) Richard Holbrooke when he was a teenager. At one point, Farrow served as a speechwriter for Holbrooke, who, as the WSWS noted in a 2010 obituary, was 'a man steeped in the commission and cover-up of bloody crimes' from Vietnam to the Balkans, Afghanistan, Pakistan and beyond."

After the publication of Farrow's attack on Moonves, we wrote in August 2018 that the latest *New Yorker* piece was "scandal-mongering at its worst." Farrow "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." In March 2019, the WSWS bluntly asserted that once again it was "Scoundrel Time," and "Ronan Farrow is one of the chief scoundrels."

Now the *Times* and sections of the establishment have turned on him. This may be driven by the Reade allegations, but there may be other issues. Did Farrow step on or threaten to step on the wrong toes? Was he sniffing around individuals at or connected to the *Times* itself, in its newsroom, editorial office or corporate boardroom?

Unquestionably, Farrow's efforts, which have cost some of his targets tens of millions of dollars, social standing and more, have made him powerful enemies. Or did he just generally make himself a nuisance? He may have become enamored of his own self-importance and been brought down by his own hubris. In any event, he is falling out of favor. The *New Yorker* claims it stands by his reporting. We shall see. No doubt re-evaluations are under way in a number of quarters.

Our eyes are dry. But the task of fully exposing the forces and motives behind the #MeToo campaign falls to the socialist movement as part of fighting for the working class to free itself from the Democratic Party and all its apologists.

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