

# Harvard UAW, pseudo-left groups organize provocation against professor John Comaroff

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Another right-wing provocation was held Tuesday afternoon at Harvard University directed against anthropology professor John Comaroff. This is the latest episode in a #MeToo-style witch-hunt that has been going on now for two-and-a-half years. There is no evidence of *any* wrongdoing on Comaroff's part. This has not stopped a layer of middle class hysterics on the campus, spearheaded by the leadership of Harvard Graduate Students Union (HGSU)-United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 5118.

The *Harvard Crimson*, which has also been at the center of the smear campaign, headlined its Wednesday article, "More than 100 Students Walk Out of Embattled Harvard Professor Comaroff's First Class of Semester." The "walkout" was of the entirely stage-managed variety. The protesters had taken seats in the classroom in order to get up and leave.

The three *Crimson* staff writers could not contain their pleasure at the chance for another attack on the distinguished scholar. Describing the scene in the classroom, they write, "As Comaroff began to speak, students rose from their seats and filed out of the classroom, chanting, 'Justice for survivors,' and 'No more Comaroff, no more complicity.'" They add, "As the walkout began," Comaroff "broke into a smile and nodded at the protesters." They refer to one student telling Comaroff to "Smile in hell, asshole."

According to the *Crimson* the protest was organized by members of Our Harvard Can Do Better and the HGSU-UAW Feminist Working Group and was attended by students associated with Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard and the Student Labor Action Movement.

In an obvious conflict of interest, the *Crimson* article quotes one of the paper's own editorial editors, Tenzin R. Gund-Morrow, 26, saying he hopes a new administration will bring changes to Harvard's policies regarding allegations of harassment and misconduct by faculty. "I'm just hoping that with any change in the administration, there will be some shift in the policy," Gund-Morrow said. "But obviously, as the organizers said, that is sadly a low chance."

The *Crimson* makes no mention of the fact that Comaroff

has never been found guilty of sexual contact or abuse of any kind. Nonetheless, the various liars continue to spread their lies. A press release issued by "Our Harvard Can Do Better," one of the organizers of the protests, read: "Harvard professor John Comaroff, whom the university found guilty of violating sexual harassment policies in 2022, attempted to return to the classroom Tuesday."

As the *World Socialist Web Site* pointed out in September 2022 responding to a *Crimson* editorial: "For the record, the case against Comaroff is without substance. He is not guilty of 'serial [sexual] assault,' nor has he ever been accused of it. Comaroff's vindictive accuser, Lilia Kilburn, was properly warned by Comaroff about the dangers of traveling with her gay partner to parts of Africa where homosexuals faced persecution.

"In his capacity as a faculty adviser, Comaroff was making Kilburn aware of the possible consequences of her actions, not only for herself, but for others."

Illegitimately, in an effort to save face and appease the identity politics zealots, Harvard punished Comaroff for his entirely appropriate warning to Kilburn. *This* was his supposed violation of the "sexual harassment policies." The university's unprincipled action, implemented by new university President Claudine Gay, then dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, opened the door to the present witch-hunt. It also facilitated the launching of a lawsuit against Harvard by Kilburn and two other graduate students, alleging that the university had failed to defend them against "sexual harassment."

As far as Kilburn's other allegations against Comaroff are concerned, the WSWS continued in September 2022, "As there is absolutely no verifiable evidence to support her claim, the circumstances strongly indicate that Kilburn, for reasons best known to herself, concocted a story about two or three 'unwanted' kisses, a claim that even Harvard's investigators, predisposed to believe accusers, felt obliged to dismiss."

The claim that the widely renowned anthropologist represents a "danger" to Harvard students, we have pointed

out, defies all reason. Comaroff is not only an accomplished academic, he is a socially conscious individual with a lengthy record of struggle against colonialism and oppression.

Wednesday's *Crimson* comments that "Our Harvard Can Do Better—an organization focused on combating campus rape culture—described Comaroff's continued presence at the University as 'shameful' and called for his resignation in a statement endorsing the walkout." The newspaper quotes organizer Rebecca S. Araten as saying, "This man is not safe to interact with undergraduate students."

It is likely that many of the students involved in the protest and probably the organizers themselves have never familiarized themselves with the facts of the case and have never read Harvard's systematic rebuttal of the graduate students' lawsuit.

A campaign page has been set up to solicit emails from students claiming "John Comaroff is a known sexual abuser. He is a danger to the Harvard community. His employment sends a message to the Harvard community, and the entire world, that sexual abuse, and misogyny are acceptable. To prioritize the safety of Harvard students and dismantle a culture that accepts sexual abuse, and misogyny, Harvard students demand John Comaroff is fired," and asserting again that he is a "danger to students." This is not only a pack of despicable lies, it is a fantasy.

The campaign has a goal of 2,500 with 239 supporters as of January 26. That even 239 students would swallow the lies of the right-wing alliance of #MeToo witch-hunters, the UAW Local 5118 leadership and unscrupulous journalists is troubling. But with Harvard's student body numbering some 23,000, the supporters of the witch-hunt are clearly in a minority.

As noted, an especially rotten role has been played in the ongoing witch-hunt by HGSU-UAW Local 5118. While leaving the official organizing of Tuesday's provocation to their "Feminist Working Group," Local 5118 enthusiastically endorsed the protest on Twitter.

HGSU-UAW has been instrumental in the cowardly attack on Comaroff. It was the UAW local that filed a grievance last August claiming that by allowing Comaroff to teach in the fall semester, Harvard was breaching its contractual agreement to maintain "a safe and healthy work and educational Environment." This grievance also falsely claimed that Comaroff had a "well-documented history of harassing women and queer students."

UAW Local 5118 is run by petty bourgeois careerists who have no genuine association with the struggles of the working class. The union leadership, in fact, includes two of Comaroff's accusers. Former HGSU President Brandon Mancilla was recently elected director of UAW Region 9a.

Mancilla was instrumental in pushing through a four-year contract with Harvard in November 2021 which imposed an effective pay cut of 1.2 percent on Harvard grad students. Mancilla will now be in a position to play the same role in relation to all Region 9a UAW members.

There are no doubt numerous self-serving interests motivating the various individuals and pseudo-left groups in this attack. For UAW Local 5118 the campaign against Comaroff also serves as a diversion from more pressing issues. On January 24, *Bloomberg Law* ran an article headlined "College, University Strike Wave Continues Its Swell Into 2023." The article notes: "The ongoing labor strife on college campuses is part of a broader trend of increased strike action across the US economy."

"Professors, graduate teaching and research assistants, and other academic workers went on strike 15 times in 2022," the piece continued, "headlined by the University of California system strike that lasted nearly six weeks and involved 48,000 graduate student workers. The year saw the most strikes by academic workers in higher education in at least 20 years."

In all of these struggles, unions such as the UAW stand on the side of the administrations and the political establishment, not the workers. The HGSU-UAW's disdain for truth and contempt for the democratic rights of professor Comaroff should be a warning as to the role they will play in future struggles of grad students. Students and faculty cannot allow this filthy campaign to continue. The silence by many at Harvard who know that Comaroff is being persecuted has to end. There must be a fight to expose the lies and mobilize support behind Comaroff.



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