

#MeToo witch-hunt targets French actor Gérard Depardieu

Samuel Tissot
21 January 2024

A state-backed witch-hunt has targeted renowned French actor Gérard Depardieu since last year and especially since the outbreak of the Israeli regime's genocidal war on Gaza in October. Although Depardieu has been convicted of no crimes, major media outlets and parties promoted as "left" in official French politics are denouncing him as a sexual predator and calling for his films to be taken off the air. Given Depardieu's vast filmography, this amounts to a call to retroactively censor many of the most influential French films of the last half century.

None of the accusations against Depardieu has been evaluated before a jury. The actor was first accused of rape by a then anonymous woman in 2018 and charged in 2020. At the start of 2024, the prosecutors' investigation is still on going. In 2021, the accuser, Charlotte Arnould, revealed her identity to promote her case in the media. Arnould, who is the daughter of friends of Depardieu, claims to have been raped twice by Depardieu during separate visits to his home.

In April last year 13 women, many of whom were anonymous, made unsubstantiated allegations of "sexual violence" against Depardieu in an article published by *Mediapart*. Since then, 12 of the 13 women have refused to open legal cases due to a lack of evidence to present to court.

The actor has denied all accusations made against him. In an open letter published in *Le Figaro* last October, he wrote: "I can no longer consent to what I hear, what I have read about myself for several months ... I have never, ever abused a woman."

Prosecutors have not managed to construct a case to bring him to trial, even though many of the allegations against him supposedly took place in front of entire film crews. Arnould's legal team have been chasing Depardieu in the courts for five years without avail. The actress filed a criminal rape case against Depardieu that was dropped in 2019 for lack of evidence. Then in 2020, she filed a new civil case, which would only leave the accused liable for financial compensation.

Depardieu opened a counter-case in 2022 to have the charge against him dropped, but this was refused by a judge who argued there was still scope for the prosecutor to gather more evidence. As of 2024, the case still has not been brought before the court. A #MeToo campaign against Depardieu has thus

continued the last 5 years without any substantial evidence ever having been made public.

This campaign received direct support from President Emmanuel Macron's government in December, when France2 state television broadcast a documentary denouncing the actor. An episode of the *Complément d'Enquête* program titled "The Fall of the Ogre" targeted Depardieu.

The documentary did not in fact feature any new evidence pertaining to the allegations against Depardieu. Rather, it centered on clips recorded while Depardieu visited North Korea in 2018. At a horse-riding school, Depardieu crudely explained to the camera his belief that women are sexually excited by horse-riding, claims they "are all sluts" and then points to a young girl riding a horse and remarks, "she's enjoying it."

Depardieu has a well-deserved reputation for being hotheaded, a heavy drinker, and is capable of making tasteless remarks. However, such remarks do not constitute a crime, nor do they constitute evidence of the validity of the various charges brought against him.

Since the release of the documentary, however, Depardieu has been stripped of his honorary Belgian citizenship and the national order of Quebec. His award of the French Legion of Honour is currently under review by the Macron government. Depardieu's films have also been pulled from the Swiss public broadcaster.

In mid-December, then culture minister Rima Abdul-Malak said Depardieu's behavior "shames France." France Televisions announced that it will not air two Depardieu movies that were scheduled to air during the Cannes Film Festival.

The state campaign against Depardieu has received broad support from the upper-middle class feminist milieu which dominates pseudo-left politics. Manuel Bompard and Mathilde Panot from Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) have both called for Depardieu's Legion of Honor award to be stripped.

The anti-Depardieu hysteria seizing the political establishment, major media and #MeToo circles reflects the pro-imperialist, essentially right-wing character of this brand of gender identity politics.

Israel's far-right regime is slaughtering tens of thousands of

Palestinian civilians in Gaza, with over 16,000 Palestinian women and children dead. Macron is hailing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as his “friend” and is pressing to escalate NATO’s war with Russia. Yet the Israeli regime and its backers are hailed in capitalist media, while Depardieu is attacked as a “monster” or an “ogre” over as-yet unsubstantiated allegations by a dozen women.

Indeed, a major element of the campaign against Depardieu is the media’s bitter hostility to his friendship with countries targeted by French and NATO imperialism. Depardieu became a Russian citizen in 2013 and has met Russian President Vladimir Putin. Two years later, he said the United States has “constantly destroyed others” and that “if the Europeans stopped listening to the Americans, well, I’d be a lot happier.”

A recent *Le Monde* editorial denouncing Depardieu reflects this intersection of French imperialism’s geostrategic agenda and its gender identity politics agenda targeting the film industry. It denounces Depardieu’s “detestable and unworthy behavior” for being comforting to “the most reactionary part of public opinion, particularly to men who consider women’s speech as an intolerable challenge to their domination.”

The editorial then argues that Depardieu should be publicly disgraced because of his association with Russia: “To proclaim pride in a man who regularly flaunts his contempt for France and his admiration for Vladimir Putin, boasts of his tax exemptions and claims to be ‘still Russian’ despite the war against Ukraine is aberrant.”

These calls to censor Depardieu’s films for reasons of sexual or great-power politics have the most far-reaching and reactionary implications, as he is arguably the most internationally-recognisable face of French cinema in the last four decades. One cannot evaluate the content of such calls based only on an actor’s provocative comments or friendships with reactionary capitalist heads of state, like Putin. Such an evaluation must begin, in reality, with the films themselves.

Depardieu’s filmography includes over 170 titles. He has starred in a number of significant historical films such as *The Last Metro* (1980) and *Danton* (1983), film versions of literary classics like Emile Zola’s *Germinal* (1993) and Edmond de Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1990), and popular comedies like the English-language *Green Card* (1990) and the *Asterix et Obelix* series. He has also played in dozens of stage and TV productions over his career.

Why do French media and parliamentary politicians linked to the Macron government or the union bureaucracies not want Depardieu’s films to be seen?

Allies of Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, a sympathizer of the Nazi-collaborationist *Action française* who runs France’s brutal riot police, do not want workers to see *The Last Metro*, about a theater company hiding its Jewish director in Nazi-occupied Paris during World War II. Nor do they wish them to see him play in *Green Card* as an immigrant facing US immigration authorities. Nationalist union bureaucrats

doubtless are not eager for workers to see *Germinal*, about a miners strike in which Depardieu’s character is killed by French troops who open fire on the strikers.

And the last thing LFI politicians would want is for Depardieu’s portrayal of Georges Danton during the French revolution to make masses of people think of revolution. The contrast between Danton (whose motto was “Audacity, Yet More Audacity, and Always Audacity”) and LFI’s record is as instructive for workers as it is embarrassing for them.

That is to say, the silencing of Depardieu’s films does not serve the interests of left-wing or revolutionary forces, but the political agenda of reactionary, militarist and fascistic forces.

Principled artists have spoken out against the witch hunt targeting Depardieu. Dozens of French actors, including a number of actresses who starred in films alongside Depardieu, signed an open letter denouncing his public “lynching.” Actress Catherine Deneuve (*The Last Metro*, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, *Belle de jour*), who published a letter in 2018 criticizing #MeToo, also defended Depardieu.

Deneuve told *Society* magazine: “That names [of the accused] are immediately, after a complaint, associated with the word rape in the press, I find it shocking—whether it is Gérard Depardieu, whom I like very much, or someone else... Before, there was a certain rigor with this kind of information, whereas now, it comes in a continuous stream into phones, it is repeated morning and evening on the television news.”

Raphaëlle Rémy-Lelou, a Green who leads the “Dare Feminism!” collective predictably slandered artists like Deneuve who defend Depardieu’s democratic rights as “supporting a culture of rape.”

Class-conscious workers and all principled defenders of democratic rights will oppose this witch hunt against Depardieu and insist that workers and youth have the right to see his films.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact