

How not to fight Judge Roy Moore

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Judge Roy Moore, the Republican candidate for US Senate in the December 12 special election in Alabama, is a diehard reactionary and enemy of the working class. He has a long record of ultra-right politics as a law-and-order prosecutor and a judge who claimed that the Bible and not the Constitution was the supreme law of the land. He is a political reactionary who would turn the clock back a century, if not more, in terms of the rights of women, blacks, gays and other minorities.

His campaign for the Republican nomination for US senator from Alabama, to fill the vacancy created by President Trump's appointment of Jeff Sessions as attorney general, had the backing of openly fascistic elements such as former White House aides Sebastian Gorka and Stephen Bannon, the chief executive of *Breitbart News*. Opposing Moore in the runoff election is a right-wing Democrat, former US Attorney Doug Jones, who advocates increasing US military spending even beyond the stratospheric levels set by Trump and the congressional Republicans, in part to benefit the array of US military bases across Alabama.

The challenge in fighting against this choice of two reactionaries is to expose the politics of both capitalist parties: the ultra-right populism of Moore, who claims to be fighting for the predominantly rural population of Alabama against the "Eastern establishment," and the mainstream corporate agenda of Jones, who has overwhelming support in the most affluent areas of Birmingham, Mobile and Montgomery, where he is seen as a more reliable and respectable defender of propertied interests.

Something very different is happening now, however, with the intervention of the corporate media, beginning with a lengthy article in the *Washington Post* last Friday depicting Moore as a sexual predator who attacked at least one victim when she was 14 and he was 32 and a county prosecutor. After a weekend media frenzy sparked by the initial report, another accuser has come forward charging that Moore assaulted her decades ago, when she was 16.

The media campaign has touched off a wave of declarations by leading congressional Republicans that Moore should withdraw as the party's candidate and the election should be postponed so that a new candidate can be substituted. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Monday that Moore had been disqualified by the charges against him.

The conduct alleged against Moore is repugnant. But there has been no criminal indictment, no trial, no judicial procedure of any kind in which the accounts of his accusers, and Moore's denials, can be tested in accordance with the rules of evidence. Given the nearly 40 years that have elapsed since the alleged offenses, there never will be such a legal proceeding since the statute of limitations has long since expired.

Even if the allegations against Moore did lead to a trial, one of the requirements of due process is that there remains a presumption of innocence for the defendant until a jury returns a finding of guilty. This is an axiomatic democratic principle that has been completely forgotten in the current atmosphere. In the wake of the torrent of accusations of sexual misconduct against numerous Hollywood figures, charges of sexual abuse and even rape are treated as indisputably true as soon as they become public.

Those on the American "left" who have embraced the anti-Moore charges, and the "me too" sexual abuse campaign more broadly, must confront the serious implications of the abandonment of the principle of "innocent until proven guilty."

It is not quite 20 years since allegations quite similar to those now rocking Hollywood and the Alabama US Senate race were leveled against a sitting president of the United States. The *World Socialist Web Site* was implacably opposed to the politics and policies of Bill Clinton, who as US president was the leader of world imperialism, waging a criminal war against Serbia, bombing Iraq, attacking Somalia and Sudan, and threatening war against North Korea and China.

But we opposed the witch hunt organized by the

Republican right wing, using the investigation by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr into Clinton's sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky. We denounced the impeachment of Clinton as an attempted political coup, an effort by the Republican right to use issues of personal sexual behavior to overturn the results of two presidential elections. (In the event, the Republicans failed to obtain the necessary votes in the Senate to convict the impeached president, and Clinton remained in office.)

If we were transported back in time 20 years, knowing what we know about the subsequent evolution of the Clintons and the Democratic Party, we would take the same position that we took in 1998. Although it must be said, in the current atmosphere of sexual witch-hunting, Clinton would never have been elected in 1992 (in the face of the Gennifer Flowers scandal), and he would certainly have been impeached in his first term (when the Paula Jones lawsuit was filed), rather than winning reelection.

Those who wish to apply the principle of "guilty as soon as accused" to Judge Roy Moore must consider what precedent is being established for the future. What happens when a nominally left-wing candidate for president, say, Bernie Sanders in 2020, faces similar allegations and salacious reports? It is not difficult to imagine *Breitbart*, Fox News and the *Wall Street Journal* leading the charge, producing women to allege misconduct by Sanders in his college days or during his bohemian existence as a carpenter in Vermont before he turned to politics. In the present environment of hysterical piling-on, Sanders could expect mass desertions from his campaign and overnight political collapse.

The presumption of innocence is a democratic principle with far-reaching implications. If Roy Moore were to be removed as the Republican candidate by means of such allegations, after winning a clear victory in the party primary, how would this develop the political consciousness of working people in Alabama, or in the United States as a whole?

Those working people who mistakenly support Moore and the Republican Party, against their real class interests, would see rank hypocrisy, as a candidate was driven out of the race for offenses that were both unproven and not much different from those alleged against several presidents, including Clinton, Trump and even, most recently, the 93-year-old ex-President George H. W. Bush.

The successful use of such charges to achieve a political result would only encourage the proliferation of such

mudslinging. American political life is already debased: Donald Trump is, after all, the elected president. To turn elections into a referendum on the alleged sexual practices of the candidates would only debase it further. And what debases political consciousness and drives public debate into the gutter aids only the right wing, which thrives in an atmosphere of ignorance, prejudice and slander.

It is noteworthy in this context that leading Republicans who have condemned Moore have done so on an explicitly antidemocratic basis. The 2012 Republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, declared, "Innocent until proven guilty is for criminal convictions, not elections."

Roy Moore is a despicable right-wing bigot who supports the criminalization of homosexuality and has twice been removed as chief judge of the Alabama Supreme Court for refusing to abide by such constitutional norms as the separation of church and state (as when he refused to move a three-ton monument to the Ten Commandments from the grounds of the state's highest court), and for instructing probate court judges to continue to enforce a state law banning same-sex marriage that had been overturned by the federal courts.

But the struggle against such a political figure requires the political education and mobilization of the working class, including the impoverished white workers of Alabama to whom Moore addresses his appeals based on religious fundamentalism and social backwardness. A campaign against Moore based on unproven—and admittedly unprovable—allegations of sexual impropriety contributes nothing to—in fact, cuts across—the political education of working people.

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