

CBS fires Charlie Rose, Oliver Stone accused

Latest in sexual misconduct purge: Ultra-rightist “tips off” media about Rep. John Conyers

By David Walsh
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The purge continues of the American media, entertainment industry and political establishment based on claims of sexual misconduct. The intervention of the ultra-right, allying itself with feminism and identity politics, is increasingly evident.

BuzzFeed reported on Monday that Democratic Congressman John Conyers of Michigan, who is 88, “settled a wrongful dismissal complaint in 2015 with a former employee who alleged she was fired because she would not ‘succumb to [his] sexual advances.’” The website was tipped off to the story by extreme right-wing media personality Mike Cernovich, an “Alt-Right” supporter of Donald Trump and promoter of various delusional conspiracy theories.

The *Washington Post* felt obliged to comment on the “BuzzFeed-Cernovich collaboration,” which it described as “odd, to say the least.” The *Post* took note of “the jagged journalistic history of Cernovich, whom ‘60 Minutes’ described earlier this year in a story about fake news as ‘a magnet for readers with a taste for stories with no basis in fact.’” The newspaper continued: “The partnership appears to have come with a hidden facet: Cernovich seems to have acquired the congressional documents after offering to pay \$10,000 for them.”

Conyers, the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, the longest-serving member of Congress and a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, acknowledged the financial agreement but denied he was guilty of sexual harassment. In a statement Tuesday, Conyers said, “In this case, I expressly and vehemently denied the allegations made against me, and continue to do so.

“My office resolved the allegations—with an express denial of liability—in order to save all involved from the rigors of protracted litigation. That should not be lost in the narrative.

The resolution was not for millions of dollars, but rather for an amount that equated to a reasonable severance payment [\$27,000].”

Conyers’ fellow Democrats indicated their willingness to throw him to the wolves. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Democrat of California, told the media Monday she was unaware of the settlement, which is no admission of guilt. On Tuesday, she commented, according to the *Detroit News*, that “any credible allegation of sexual harassment must be investigated by the [House] Ethics Committee,” without indicating whether this applied to Conyers’ case.

Rep. Debbie Dingell of Dearborn, another Democrat, termed the accusations against Conyers “deeply disturbing” and agreed that they should be referred to the Ethics Committee for a “transparent, fair and thorough” investigation. “Sexual harassment of any kind is unacceptable, and everyone deserves to work in an environment that is free from harassment and hostility,” Dingell said in her statement.

On Tuesday, both the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and CBS News fired Charlie Rose, veteran PBS interview show host and, most recently, co-anchor of “CBS This Morning,” after the *Washington Post* published an article citing the allegations of eight women that Rose had acted inappropriately, including groping and lewd phone calls. CBS suspended Rose on Monday, and then fired him the next day.

A statement by CBS News President David Rhodes announced the termination of Rose’s employment, “effective immediately.” Rhodes asserted that the action stemmed from “the revelation yesterday of extremely disturbing and intolerable behavior said to have revolved around his PBS program.” The alleged behavior occurred from the late 1990s to 2011.

Rhodes sanctimoniously continued, “Despite Charlie’s

important journalistic contribution to our news division, there is absolutely nothing more important, in this or any organization, than ensuring a safe, professional workplace—a supportive environment where people feel they can do their best work.”

Rose’s former colleagues at “CBS This Morning” quickly turned on him. Co-anchor Norah O’Donnell, apparently unaware of the absurdity of her remarks, commented, “Let me be clear: There is no excuse for this *alleged* behavior.” She added later, “This will be investigated. This has to end. This behavior is wrong, period.” The harsh punishment for “alleged behavior” comes first; investigation comes later.

In a statement, Rose said, “I have behaved insensitively at times, and I accept responsibility for that, though I do not believe that all of these allegations are accurate. I always felt that I was pursuing shared feelings, even though I now realize I was mistaken.”

Careers and reputations are being ruined daily on the basis of claims and allegations, none of which have been proven. The atmosphere of the McCarthyite “red scare” has been revived.

Actress Melissa Gilbert contributed to the degrading national frenzy on Monday, claiming that director Oliver Stone had submitted her to a demeaning audition for his 1991 film *The Doors*, about the rock ‘n’ roll band.

During an interview on a satellite radio show, Gilbert claimed that Stone had written a special scene “that he wanted me to do for him physically in the casting room, and it was humiliating and horrid.” Gilbert alleged that Stone was getting back at her for having embarrassed him publicly with something she said. “He got me back and it hurt,” the former child star of *Little House on the Prairie* continued.

Stone (*Platoon*, *Wall Street*, *JFK*, *Snowden*) actually stood up for himself Tuesday, explaining that each performer had been warned the auditions for *The Doors* would be extreme. In a statement to the *Hollywood Reporter*, the veteran director said, “We auditioned dozens of actors for roles in *The Doors* and it was made clear from the outset that our film was going to be a raunchy, no-holds-barred rock ‘n’ roll movie. Anyone auditioning was told the scenes would be rehearsed and performed from a script, with my casting director, Risa Bramon Garcia, present throughout the process to ensure a safe environment for all actors who auditioned.”

Garcia also issued a statement, describing the auditions as “challenging.” She added, “However, every actor who auditioned came in voluntarily and was aware of the provocative material prior to engaging in their scenes... In my experience, there was no attempt [by Stone] to personally offend any particular actor. I always have and still do go out of my way to create a safe and creative space

for actors in the audition room. It was no different on *The Doors*.”

Stone has come under particular fire because he initially refused to condemn Harvey Weinstein when allegations were made against the producer in early October. At the time, Stone told a press conference at the Busan International Film Festival in South Korea, where he served as chair of the event’s competition jury, “I’m a believer that you wait until this thing gets to trial. I believe a man shouldn’t be condemned by a vigilante system. It’s not easy what he’s going through, either. During that period he [Weinstein] was a rival. I never did business with him and didn’t really know him. I’ve heard horror stories on everyone in the business, so I’m not going to comment on gossip. I’ll wait and see, which is the right thing to do.”

Stone’s defense of elementary legal rights “sparked ire,” in the words of the *Hollywood Reporter*.

In a related development, actress Olivia Munn demanded in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* November 18 that director-producer Brett Ratner be driven out of Hollywood on the basis of unsubstantiated allegations, including her own, about his behavior.

“I want Warner Bros. to sever all ties and relationships with Brett Ratner,” she told the *Times*. The newspaper published the original charges. Ratner’s attorney, Martin Singer, has denied the allegations against his client in a 10-page letter to the *Times*.

The *Globe and Mail* in Canada has published a continuously updated list of more than 50 individuals who have been named in recent weeks in the sexual harassment scandal. In many cases, the “naming” is a career death sentence.

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