

Australian dramatic arts workers defend Geoffrey Rush, denounce #MeToo witch-hunt

By our reporters
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Film, television and theatre production workers in Sydney and Melbourne have denounced the unsubstantiated accusations levelled against Australian actor Geoffrey Rush. Those who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* also raised their concerns about the #MeToo campaign and its reactionary and anti-democratic character.

Rush is currently suing Rupert Murdoch's *Daily Telegraph*, a Sydney tabloid, and its celebrity gossip columnist Jonathon Moran, for defamation. The newspaper recently reported unspecified allegations from an unnamed female cast member, who was said to have claimed that Rush displayed "inappropriate" behaviour during the Sydney Theatre Company (STC) production of *King Lear* in 2015–16. An unnamed STC official reportedly told the *Telegraph* about the allegations but failed to provide Rush or the public with any details about Rush's alleged misbehaviour and insisted that the individual making the accusations remain anonymous.

Rush, who was recently nominated for a Golden Globe award for portraying Albert Einstein in the telemovie *Genius*, was forced to step aside as founding president of the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts, following demands by senior management of Foxtel and Australia's Seven network.

Rebecca, a former actor for the Queensland Theatre Company and Arena Theatre, said the campaign against Rush and the overthrowing of "presumption of innocence" was "horrifying."

"None of the allegations against him have been proven. In fact, you have anonymous, unproven allegations being used to destroy a career. I think the term witch-hunt is entirely appropriate—it's not hyperbolic at all. It's irrelevant what you think of Rush. It's a question of principle. Where is due

process? We're talking about basic legal concepts developed in the Enlightenment being under attack.

"Sexual harassment is obviously a serious issue but what about the fact that tens of thousands of people die every day under capitalism because they can't get clean drinking water? More importantly, what about the looming danger of a third world war?"

"People need to ask why this is happening now and what this #MeToo campaign is really about. There's nothing progressive about it and its methods represent an attack on democratic rights and long established legal rights. It is an attempt to dull the class issues. How can a so-called progressive cause be advanced by using reactionary methods?"

Steve, who has worked in television and theatre staging for the past 30 years, said he was deeply concerned about how Rush was being targeted. "It's a classic witch-hunt and bullying situation," he said, "and reminds me of what happened in Hollywood during the McCarthyite anti-communist years.

"It's very easy for the media to get this sort of thing going and people tend not to think about the allegations rationally once the ball gets rolling. Murdoch's tabloids use all sorts of emotive techniques and work for a new knee-jerk reaction on everything they cover.

"It's not just a matter of defending Geoffrey Rush, and others caught up by these sexual allegations, but of defending presumption of innocence, due process and other basic legal principles.

"I know how difficult it is to get work in film, television and theatre if you're an actor. It's very difficult to make a living and only a handful do. Geoffrey Rush would be one of the few actors to have been able to do so in this country but the sort of allegations being thrown around can destroy his career in an instant.

“The pressure is on now actors to keep quiet or join the witch-hunt because if they denounce it they’ll be black-balled and added to the list. This is classic bullying and reminds us what Bush did as part of the so-called war on terror. ‘You’re either with us or you’re with the terrorists,’ Bush said.

“I’m glad Rush is suing the Murdoch press and I hope he wins but he is probably the only actor in Australia that could do this. It’s a rarity for people in our industry to take on the *Daily Telegraph*.”

George, who has worked in film and television for more than 25 years, is currently working at the government-financed Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

“I don’t know Geoffrey Rush, but I defend unreservedly his right to the presumption of innocence,” he said. “If someone wishes to accuse him, let them do so in court, where he can defend himself and subject their allegations to rigorous examination. Until that happens, he should be treated as an innocent man.

“I’ve dealt with some of the Hollywood studios, and know how ruthless they are. The decision to remove all trace of Kevin Spacey from *All the Money in the World*, and similar summary justice being meted out, has nothing to do with concern about women’s rights. It’s entirely about protecting investments.

“I’ve no doubt that the treatment of Rush and other public figures will be used to set a precedent more broadly, where unsubstantiated allegations—whether of “sexual misconduct” or otherwise—will be used to silence or destroy those with left-wing views.

“The #MeToo campaign and its ‘zero tolerance for abusers,’ which treats any allegation as fact, is reactionary and very disturbing. It seeks to promote a ‘gendered’ view of the world, which divides women from men and attempts to deny that the fundamental division in society is class.”

George said although the Murdoch press initiated a “trial by media” witch-hunt against Rush, the government-funded ABC played a key part.

“The ABC has played the leading role in a number of reactionary media campaigns. There’s the anti-Chinese propaganda campaign this year, which has led directly to the introduction of new anti-democratic laws ostensibly to prevent ‘foreign interference’ and the ABC’s involvement in the Howard government’s

Northern Territory Intervention in 2007.

“The ABC aired sensational allegations of rampant sexual abuse of children in remote Aboriginal communities, which were used to support an emergency militarised response and anti-democratic laws, including the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act.

“The real agenda of that intervention was not to save children, but to slash welfare, break up remote communities and take control of their land. There are clear parallels with the sort of methods and pseudo-moralism used in current sexual impropriety witch-hunt.”

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