

IMF chief Christine Lagarde gives #MeToo the banks' seal of approval

By Alex Lantier
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One event that occurred during the Davos summit casts a revealing light on the anti-democratic character of the feminist #MeToo campaign. In the luxurious Alpine resort, surrounded by political representatives of big business and assorted billionaires, and guarded against any possible protests by a small army of several thousand Swiss soldiers, three people seriously discussed a very great question: the oppression they face as women.

They were Christine Lagarde, the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and *Le Monde* reporters Sylvie Kauffmann and Isabelle Chaperon. The resulting interview in *Le Monde*, which combines absurdity with hypocrisy, shows above all how #MeToo helped trigger a reactionary movement in the propertied classes that has little or nothing to do with a defence of women against sexual assault.

The victims of #MeToo witch-hunts, based on humiliating but largely unsubstantiated sexual allegations, starting with US film producer Harvey Weinstein, have still not been tried or had their right to due process. But behind the accusations against Weinstein, substantial political forces were being set into motion on both sides of the Atlantic. *Le Monde*'s interview with Lagarde shows that the forces driving #MeToo prominently included the banks and the corporate media.

Asked if she speaks "a lot" about #MeToo, Lagarde replied in the affirmative: "I see that this #MeToo moment creates great embarrassment for men. Every time that I have raised these issues before an audience containing both genders, I saw that men were extremely embarrassed to speak up." Hailing #MeToo as a "collective movement" for the interests of women that must continue, she added: "But we must really not imagine that here it is, this time we won."

Lagarde continues: "This movement can only remain active if it is kept alive by measuring the problem, setting up objectives, actions, surveillance, and classifying people. We must continue to do this. Above all, we must not let down our guard."

This is what a group of 100 women, including actress Catherine Deneuve, criticized in a statement published in *Le Monde*, warning that #MeToo was creating a "totalitarian" climate. Programs and bureaucracies are being set up to watch, measure, and classify behaviour so as to create a climate in which everyone is sexually suspect. This serves very specific political aims. #MeToo has provided a political diversion and helped advance a bill to create a new police force, supposedly to defend women against immigrant workers in French suburbs, while a dangerous nuclear war hysteria against Russia is stoked up in Washington,.

This militarist, law-and-order campaign has nothing to do with a defence of women. Lagarde said she had not herself faced sexual harassment, "probably because I am 180 cm [5 foot 9 inches] tall!" Nevertheless, the interview went on to try to justify the necessity to develop the #MeToo movement based on Lagarde's personal frustrations as head of the IMF.

Asked by *Le Monde* if she "believes she is a victim of discrimination," Lagarde replied: "Yes, even to this day. I see the way men look at women, and the way they pay attention and the way they are preoccupied with what women say is slightly funny. In the best case, it can take the form of paternalism, a way of being protective. But it can also be a condescending look, a gaze that says, 'That one is now going to bore us for another quarter of an hour'."

What to say? It is ludicrous for Christine Lagarde to claim she is oppressed. When she suffers the ordeal of the slightly funny male gaze, she can rely on resources

that the overwhelming majority of women (and men) do not have, which she amassed over a career as a corporate lawyer and director of global law firm Baker McKenzie, then as a minister in various right-wing French governments. When she was condemned for criminal negligence for having overseen the improper payment of €405 million in taxpayer funds to businessman Bernard Tapie, she was given no sentence at all.

Since 2011 she has headed the IMF, the main international bank and sovereign bailout fund, thus controlling hundreds of billions of dollars. The policies she has approved have devastated entire countries and earned the anger and hatred of millions of workers. So she is rewarded with a tax exemption on her €473,847 yearly salary—a far cry from the plight of the Greek working people upon whom she has helped impose massive austerity, major tax increases and, in 2012, a unilateral and authoritarian 20 percent cut in the minimum wage.

Lagarde also cultivated a reputation as a feminist, which she cynically manipulates. She famously blamed the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy and the 2008 Wall Street crash not on the banks, but on men, declaring: “Lehman Sisters would have caused fewer problems than Lehman Brothers.” After the death of King Abdullah in 2015—to flatter the Saudi royal family, whose hostility to women’s democratic rights is well known—she ludicrously called the deceased a “great defender of women.”

This ridiculous narrative in which Lagarde bemoaned the “discrimination” she has suffered is a lesson on the reactionary character of #MeToo and its underlying political conceptions. Mobilizing a petty-bourgeois feminist constituency indifferent to democratic rights and implicitly favourable to capitalism and war, it created a climate in which a right-wing female banker like Lagarde could posture as a defender of the oppressed.

This atmosphere is not only a threat to democratic rights of the largely male victims of the sexual witch-hunts organized by #MeToo. It is also a threat to the democratic rights of women, as became evident as a torrent of denunciations was unleashed against Deneuve over her signature on the statement of 100 women who criticized #MeToo and argued for the “liberty to inconvenience” others, including by making

sexual advances.

Some of the women who signed the statement are already facing censorship of their work: a pro-#MeToo collective has unilaterally scotched the showing and discussion of the film *L’Astragale* by Brigitte Sy, who signed the anti-#MeToo statement.

Lagarde coldly ignored all these issues to simply denounce the Deneuve statement, which she said was “horribly clumsy.” She then hypocritically tried to present her support for #MeToo as a defence of African women.

To explain the importance of #MeToo, Lagarde told *Le Monde*: “The movement was started by actresses, by beautiful women, who had the courage to speak out, and that had a considerable global echo due to their visibility. This is very important when, as is well known, 80 percent of new AIDS cases in Africa are those of young girls between 13 and 14 years old, who undergo sexual relations that are often forced.”

Trying to pass off the struggle against the spread of AIDS in Africa as a key concern of the IMF, the French right, and of #MeToo is a political travesty. The IMF regularly imposes austerity measures on African countries torn apart by ethnic tensions that French imperialism or other imperialist powers have deliberately stoked ever since they colonized the region. The IMF is not at all innocent in the inciting of civil wars that have devastated the continent and created conditions in which many young women tragically contract AIDS.

The struggle for the defence of women’s rights around the world requires a socialist opposition to imperialism, war, and the banks, and not the diktat of the financial aristocrats backing #MeToo.

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