

The downfall of New York attorney general Eric Schneiderman

By David Walsh and Eric London
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Several hours after the *New Yorker* magazine published a May 7 feature article titled, “Four Women Accuse New York’s Attorney General of Physical Abuse,” Eric Schneiderman, New York’s Attorney General, issued his resignation, effective the following day. Schneiderman has denied the accusations.

In effect, because of unsubstantiated allegations by two former lovers about what went on primarily in the bedroom, a top official in New York state, for whom 2.5 million people voted in 2010 and 2 million in 2014, has been forced from office overnight. The *New Yorker* article hit newsstands just weeks before the filing deadline to run in the primaries for the attorney general race this fall.

Schneiderman’s rivals conducted their campaign through the pages of the *New York Times*. On May 8, the paper immediately and heartily endorsed the “disappearing” of Schneiderman in an editorial titled, “The Wreckage Schneiderman Leaves Behind.” In the article, the *Times* prominently calls for the selection of Barbara Underwood as interim attorney general. Later that day, Underwood was appointed to the post. On May 9, the *Times* had the gall to publish an article titled, “No Back-Room Deal to Replace Schneiderman” in which the paper denounced politicians for “advanc[ing] their own political causes”!

The co-authors of the *New Yorker* piece are Jane Mayer and Ronan Farrow. Farrow, the son of actress Mia Farrow and comic-filmmaker Woody Allen, helped launch the ongoing sexual harassment witch-hunt with his article last October, also in the *New Yorker*, recounting allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.

We have no use for Schneiderman, the top law enforcement official in New York, a state that contains New York City, one of the centers of world finance and business and one of the most socially divided urban areas on the planet.

However, while in office, he caused expense and inconvenience for certain people. The *Times*, on May 9, published an article (“Eric Schneiderman’s Legacy in Financial Cases May Survive His Downfall”) that is extremely damning from the point of view of its reactionary editorial only the day before.

The article notes that “Mr. Schneiderman’s big accomplishment in going after Wall Street were the billions of dollars in penalties that he helped secure from big banks that had sold flawed mortgage-backed bonds during the run-up to the financial crisis. He ensured that some of that money went to help communities across the state that were overrun by abandoned houses and foreclosures—often referred to as ‘zombie homes.’”

It further points to settlements with or investigations into Barclays and Credit Suisse, Exxon Mobil and Caliber Home Loans. Schneiderman, a Democrat, also bumped up against Donald Trump, filing a lawsuit against the laughably named Trump University, “accusing the school of taking advantage of thousands of customers and running a ‘bait and switch’ educational program.” The suit was settled for a meager \$25 million.

A previous New York attorney general, Eliot Spitzer, who later became governor, also ruffled feathers in financial circles, the same *Times* piece notes, by making use of “a little-known state law called the Martin Act to aggressively pursue allegations of criminal and civil wrongdoing on Wall Street.” Spitzer was elected governor in 2006 and subsequently done in by a *New York Times*-led sex scandal in 2008.

Billions of dollars, including a great deal of personal wealth, are involved here, even if the actions of both attorneys general were merely cosmetic.

The *Times*, it should be noted, is a publicly traded company that has increased both digital subscriptions and corporate profits since the #MeToo movement was launched last fall. In its most recent quarterly profit report, the *Times* reported its own tax expense dropped from \$10.7 million in the first quarter of 2017 to \$5.3 million in this year’s first quarter as a result of Trump’s corporate tax cuts.

The evidence strongly suggests that Schneiderman (like Spitzer) was removed from office not primarily because of the character of his personal relationships, but for conduct that Wall Street, which has a near absolute veto over significant political decision-making in the US, considered impermissible—perhaps as well because of his national political ambitions, which cut across the plans of important Democratic Party circles. To rid themselves of Schneiderman, these powerful financial and political interests made use of the always compliant New York media. Via the medium of the sex scandal, these interests settle scores, further shift policies to their benefit and intimidate any potential “crusaders.”

The Mayer-Farrow *New Yorker* article is a travesty from beginning to end. Its headline misleadingly refers to four women, but only two actually provide their names, Michelle Manning Barish and Tanya Selvaratnam.

Each woman, “articulate, progressive Democratic feminists in their forties who live in Manhattan,” according to the article, was

romantically involved with Schneiderman *for more* Manning Barish, who asserts that the attorney general “grew violent” some four weeks into their relationship, remained involved with Schneiderman “off and on, *for nearly two years*.” She says that when they had sex he often slapped her across the face without her consent, and that she felt ‘emotionally battered’ by cruel remarks that he made.” (Emphasis added.) Selvaratnam’s allegations are similar. Schneiderman contends that whatever occurred was consensual.

Mayer and Farrow present no proof, aside from the women’s comments. We are meant to accept their claims at face value.

If the charges *are* true, then it points to the fraudulent and empty character of the #MeToo campaign, of which Schneiderman has been a leading proponent.

The May 8 *New York Times* editorial also accepted the allegations of the two women without reservation. It noted that Schneiderman, in “the space of a few short hours on Monday evening,” had gone “from being known as one of the nation’s most progressive and influential attorneys general to being cast as a drunken, abusive monster who terrorized women in his personal life even as he publicly advocated women’s rights.” No doubt he was “cast” as a “monster,” by two individuals, but was he one?

The *Times* continued: “Mr. Schneiderman’s fall was so fast, the allegations against him so appalling and the depth of his apparent hypocrisy so astounding that the lesson will take some time to sort out. But it is already clear that his betrayal operates on at least three levels.”

How can there be “apparent hypocrisy” and “betrayal” operating on one, two, three or any number of levels when nothing has been proven against Schneiderman? Allegations may be as “appalling” as one likes, but that does not change them from being allegations, i.e., unproven claims. The editors also wrote, “It’s not yet clear how many people knew of Mr. Schneiderman’s alleged behavior, but these accusations come as such a shock in large part because of the values Mr. Schneiderman professed to hold.” How can actual existing people be aware of “alleged behavior,” behavior that may not have taken place? What if the behavior never happened at all, should they nonetheless have been aware of it?

The role of Farrow in this latest dirty tricks operation requires a little attention. A repugnant figure, a State Department-trained propagandist, complicit in American imperialist crimes during the “war on terror” epoch, Farrow has now been let loose to wreak havoc in US political and cultural circles.

He cut his teeth on the Darfur campaign, the collective crocodile tears shed by sections of the North American and European middle class (and celebrity affluentsia in particular) over the mass suffering in Sudan. He visited the area a number of times, along with his mother, in his capacity as UNICEF Spokesperson for Youth and supposed “advocate” for children and women caught up in the Darfur conflict.

Farrow’s mentor was the late imperialist hatchet-man, Richard Holbrooke, who performed his dirty work on behalf of American interests for half a century, from Vietnam to the Balkans and Afghanistan.

Farrow, who regards Holbrooke as “a diplomatic giant” and “the

closest thing to a father I had,” first worked for the veteran operative in 2004—as an aide and speechwriter—while still a teenager. Once Obama took office in 2009, Farrow was appointed Special Adviser for Humanitarian and NGO Affairs in the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. In this capacity he oversaw “the U.S. Government’s relationships with civil society and non-governmental actors.” In 2011, he became Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s Special Adviser for Global Youth Issues and Director of the State Department’s Office of Global Youth Issues.

In fact, the “special” concern of Clinton and Farrow was the growing youth radicalization. As Farrow notes in his new book, *War on Peace: The End of Diplomacy and the Decline of American Influence*: “After Richard Holbrooke’s death, I had put together a small team of Foreign Service officers to focus on the global implications of the youth unrest I’d seen vividly in Afghanistan and then had unfolded across North Africa and the Middle East.”

Along the same lines, on the occasion of his delivering the 2011 commencement address at Bard College, his alma mater, Farrow commented, “One thing I’ve learned is that young people will make themselves heard, whatever it takes. When they turn to extremism to accomplish that, young people can be one of the great threats to global stability.” He went on, “That challenge is just as acute at home as it is abroad. We fail to empower the next generation at the peril of our security and economic primacy.”

Farrow made another telling admission when he spoke on May 8 this year at Claremont McKenna University’s commencement ceremony:

“There was a moment about a year ago when I didn’t have the institutional support of my news organization. My contract was ending ... My book publisher dropped me, refusing to look at a single page of a manuscript I’d labored over for years.”

And then, all of a sudden, “institutional support” materialized. Decisions were made in the halls of power. Influential people in the media and political establishment became convinced that Farrow’s story could serve to advance their interests. They gave their initiative a moniker: #MeToo.

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