

The Kavanaugh hearing: Sexual allegations fuel the Democratic Party's right-wing politics

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In the coming week, the Senate Judiciary Committee will hold hearings on whether Trump's Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh sexually assaulted Christine Blasey Ford when the two were in high school in the early 1980s.

At the conclusion of the theatrics, nobody will be any more informed as to the truth than they were when Ford's allegation became public over a week ago. Ford claims Kavanaugh groped her and attempted to force himself on her at a party in Maryland 36 years ago, while Kavanaugh denies the allegation.

Whatever happened or did not happen at the high school party, Ford's allegation has become the central issue upon which the entire political establishment is almost exclusively fixated in the lead-up to the midterm election. It is necessary to understand the political interests elevating Ford's claim to the national stage.

There are any number of issues that the Democratic Party could have focused on in opposing the nomination of Kavanaugh—his participation in drafting the torture policies of the Bush administration, his role in the Clinton impeachment campaign, his extreme right-wing positions on abortion rights and business regulations. There was a conscious and deliberate decision to instead focus entirely on charges related to what Kavanaugh may have done when he was still a juvenile.

It is a practiced act of political manipulation. Over the past 25 years, sex scandals have become central mechanisms for working out political conflicts in a system dominated by oligarchs incapable of making any direct appeal to the social or economic interests of the broad masses of working people.

In the mid-1990s, when the Republican Party used allegations of sexual impropriety to maneuver against then-President Bill Clinton, the Democratic Party responded with hostility, with Hillary Clinton correctly calling the accusations part of "a vast right-wing conspiracy."

Twenty years later, it is the Democrats who chiefly rely on allegations of sexual misconduct.

The 2018 elections are a major factor in the Democrats' calculations. In the elections and more generally in its entire opposition to Trump, the Democrats have worked to smother and suppress the fundamental class questions that are of concern to the vast majority of the population—social

inequality, attacks on immigrant workers, the destruction of democratic rights, etc. The main focus has been on allegations of "Russian meddling," a political narrative that corresponds to the foreign policy strategy of dominant sections of the ruling class.

The politics of sex scandals is the main additional political foundation of Democratic Party politics. The release of Ford's accusation was clearly timed to coincide with the final stage of the midterm election campaign and generate maximum media attention.

Once the allegation was leaked to the public, Ford's attorney, Debra Katz, a long-time Democratic donor who gave thousands of dollars to Hillary Clinton's campaigns and referred to Trump supporters as "miscreants," called for an FBI investigation that could extend the nomination process—and dominate the airwaves—until Election Day.

Then, Democratic Party-aligned groups like Demand Justice began running election ads that frame Republicans as defenders of rape and sexual assault.

The ads recall George H. W. Bush's "tough-on-crime" campaign ad from 1988, in which Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis was depicted as a defender of a felon convicted of rape, Willie Horton. In one of Demand Justice's ads, the narrator reads, "When 15 year-old Christine tried to scream, her attacker covered her mouth so no one could hear her... Will [Republican Nevada Senator] Dean Heller listen?" The ad failed to mention that Ford's claims are only allegations.

The aim of the Democratic Party in making Ford's allegations a center point of its election campaign is two-fold. First, it is connected to the Democrats' promotion of identity politics, aimed at appealing to more affluent sections of the upper-middle class that are one of the party's main constituencies. The allegations of Ford can be incorporated into the false claim that the basic division in society is between men and women.

According to an NBC article reviewing 2018 election polling data, the strategy is paying off. "Republicans are already facing big problems this year with college educated white women in affluent suburban districts," the article reads, quoting

Democratic pollster Cornell Belcher, who said, “Almost every week, Donald Trump does something that makes these suburban women clutch their pearls.”

Second, the Democrats are highly practiced in utilizing issues of sexual violence and harassment to obscure and suppress class issues (including the class issues involved in sexual harassment) and pollute and manipulate public consciousness to promote policies that are highly undemocratic and ultimately reactionary.

The 2016 election marked a turning point in this strategy, when the Hillary Clinton campaign disparaged working class voters as “deplorables,” avoided criticizing Trump’s right-wing program and instead focused on allegations of sexual harassment centered on the publication of the “Access Hollywood” tape in the weeks before the election.

Earlier that year, during the Democratic primaries, the Clinton campaign turned the allegedly lenient sentencing of Stanford student Brock Turner into a national political issue in order to present her campaign as the vehicle for women’s empowerment. The aim was to “change the narrative” from the issues of social inequality that had motivated widespread support, including from young and working class women, for the campaign of Bernie Sanders. The central demand that resulted from this campaign was for harsher sentencing laws, a traditional plank of the far-right.

Rather than pulling back after Clinton’s defeat, the Democratic Party intensified the gender and identity appeal during the 2017 Alabama Senate election, campaigning primarily on the question of allegations that Roy Moore was a rapist and pedophile. Similar allegations were later used to force the resignation of Democratic Minnesota Senator Al Franken and Democratic New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman.

The launching of the #MeToo campaign laid the foundation for the escalation of this Democratic Party initiative. In October 2017, the *New York Times* and former Democratic State Department aide Ronan Farrow inaugurated the #MeToo campaign with the ouster of Harvey Weinstein. The campaign has been used to severely undermine due process and promote outright censorship, as in the recent forced resignation of *New York Review of Books* editor Ian Buruma for publishing an article by Jian Ghomeshi, who had been accused and *acquitted* of sexual misconduct.

The response to the Ford allegations is the latest step in this operation.

Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster and political consultant, was quoted in a CNBC article titled “Kavanaugh accusation reignites #MeToo ahead of midterm elections—and a new ‘Year of the Woman’ could be really bad news for Republicans.”

Lake said, “It is the Year of the Woman, and [Republicans] nominated none. The single biggest mistake that the Republican Party made was not nominating more women.”

This is a revealing remark. According to the Democratic

Party, what matters is not the fact that Trump and the Republicans have drastically slashed taxes for the wealthy, separated thousands of immigrant children from their parents, eviscerated workplace safety and environmental regulations, and drastically increased military spending at the expense of the social needs of the population.

Groups like the International Socialist Organization have supported this right-wing campaign. In an article titled “#MeToo versus the Senate,” Socialistworker.org writes: “the victim-blaming and the shaming of Blasey has already shaped public opinion, and it needs to be mobilized *in whatever way possible* to oppose the drive to put another sexual assaulter on the Supreme Court.” (Emphasis added.) This is an open call to support the Democratic Party.

In the end, if the Democrats do win control of Congress, they will either help confirm Kavanaugh or ensure the nomination of an equally reactionary justice. The Democrats are in fundamental agreement with Trump and Kavanaugh’s right-wing program.

The ruling class is taking note of indications of a coming social explosion, manifest in the highest level of strike activity in decades. Polls show massive opposition to Trump, growing anger over both parties’ pro-corporate economic program and rising interest among workers and youth in socialism. Under these conditions, the ruling class seeks to poison the atmosphere, pit workers against each other, and weaken the international working class in anticipation of great class battles ahead.

The task of socialists is to unmask the right-wing agenda the Democrats are attempting to advance behind the smokescreen of sex scandals and to fight to unify the working class worldwide in the struggle for socialism.

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