

Ronan Farrow promotes #MeToo witch hunt in University of Michigan talk

By Oscar Gray
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The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, as part of its “Wallace House Presents” speaker series, hosted an event on March 19 titled “The Weinstein Effect: Breaking the Stories That Spurred a Movement.”

The event consisted of a conversation between Ken Auletta, a writer on various media issues, and Ronan Farrow, the *New Yorker* contributing writer whose October 2017 article about Harvey Weinstein helped touch off the #MeToo campaign.

The two-hour event was dominated by self-promotion and self-congratulation, identity politics and contempt for basic democratic rights. In their meandering comments, which were distinctly deficient in terms of facts and details, the two speakers took for granted that Farrow’s mix of hearsay, unproven allegations and anonymous comments constituted “evidence” of wrongdoing.

The event underscored the fact that #MeToo is a political campaign alien from—and hostile to—the interests of the working class, both women and men.

Farrow, a former State Department propagandist who worked for diplomat Richard Holbrooke and Hillary Clinton, has experienced a career surge since penning the initial *New Yorker* article about Weinstein, as well as subsequent articles, including one that eventually led to the resignation of Les Moonves, CEO of the CBS Corporation.

HBO has brought Farrow on to produce a series of documentaries on “the abuse of power by individuals and institutions” for the cable and satellite television network. He has also signed a deal with Little, Brown and Company for a book about the Weinstein investigation.

In 2018, Farrow received the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for the Weinstein reporting, along with the *New York Times*, which won for articles by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey. The *Times* and the *Washington Post* won the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting the same year for the war-mongering (and now discredited) coverage of “Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and its connections to the Trump campaign.”

Meanwhile, the #MeToo campaign has been used to target, smear and destroy the careers of dozens of artists and public figures, all while undermining core democratic principles, including due process. The campaign is pursued relentlessly in

the media and political establishment, particularly the Democratic Party, as part of a campaign to erode democratic rights, direct social anger along reactionary lines and open up new pathways to power for privileged layers of the upper middle class.

The March 19 audience, which filled roughly two-thirds of the University of Michigan’s Rackham Auditorium, largely consisted of older attendees and faculty members. Despite the endless promotion of #MeToo on college campuses, the event did not capture the attention of large numbers of young people.

The occasion for the event was the Wallace House’s decision to award Farrow a Livingston Award for Young Journalists, described on the organization’s website as “honor[ing] journalists under the age of 35 for outstanding achievement in local, national and international reporting across all forms of journalism.”

Farrow was introduced as a “groundbreaking” reporter whose work set “the gold standard of sexual misconduct reporting” and set off “a tidal wave of societal change.” His reporting, it was claimed, “unveiled the tools at the disposal of America’s most powerful figures as they seek to silence their many victims.”

Farrow and Auletta presented a narrative of Farrow’s reporting that depicted him as an “investigative journalist” who was combating “power structures and power imbalances” while “aggressively searching for the truth.”

This is fraudulent. Farrow’s work is not in the tradition of genuine investigative journalism, associated with the efforts of those such as Seymour Hersh and Robert Parry, which seeks to expose crimes committed by powerful economic and political forces against the interests of broad layers of the population. In fact, sex scandals have a right-wing pedigree, as they have often been used to poison the social atmosphere and scapegoat oppressed populations (African Americans in the southern US, Jews in Germany under the Nazis, Muslims in Europe today, etc.).

Farrow’s sheet-sniffing “exposures” are little more than smear campaigns replete with unverifiable claims and salacious details appealing to readers’ basest instincts.

While Hersh has been effectively blacklisted by major American news publications for his work exposing US lies and

war crimes, Farrow is a highly paid and connected figure whose efforts have won him—as the University of Michigan event demonstrates—a great deal of praise, and money, from the political and media establishment.

This is itself a reflection of the political and social character of #MeToo as a whole. #MeToo is not a “movement” emanating from the social grievances of masses of women. Rather, it is a campaign promoted and advanced by the uppermost layers of the political and media establishment, including the Democratic Party and the *New York Times*—organizations whose leaders are responsible for far more grievous crimes against humanity than anything of which Weinstein has been accused.

For all the talk of “bringing down” powerful figures, the #MeToo campaign has empowered some of the most vicious and reactionary elements in the media and state apparatus. Artists who have been accused have had their works removed from public view, and actors have been expunged from films in Stalinist fashion.

Meanwhile, figures such as Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning have suffered illegal imprisonment or torture for uncovering and publishing the truth about US war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. These figures, who represent genuine courage in journalism and whistleblowing, have been either ignored or contemptuously dismissed by the #MeToo crowd.

No one at the Wallace House event mentioned the persecution of Assange and WikiLeaks nor Manning’s recent jailing, despite the fact that the Trump administration’s crusade against these figures represents a grave threat to press freedom and core democratic rights.

The issue of “accountability” was a theme Farrow returned to often, at one point stating that, “I don’t think we have in the media fully come to grips with the extent to which we were failing to hold the powerful accountable and contributed to a cover-up culture. I don’t think we’ve extended the tentative steps towards accountability to all of the segments of society that desperately need it.”

What exactly do Farrow and his ilk mean when they appeal for “accountability?” The vast majority of those accused in the #MeToo campaign have not been convicted, or even charged, with any crime.

In the hands of the #MeToo inquisitors, “accountability” is essentially a code word for vigilantism. These self-appointed arbiters of morality select their targets, make use of anonymous “accusers,” and destroy lives without the accused being given a chance to answer their claims—or in some cases, without even knowing the nature of the accusations against them.

History is replete with figures who have been “held accountable” in such fashion, from the victims of lynchings in the South to the murder of Leo Frank by an anti-Semitic gang. Not once has this sort of mob justice been associated with anything progressive in society. And with the ruling elite’s

building up and sharpening of the mechanisms of repression in response to a global upsurge of working class struggle, who is to say it won’t be left-wing activists, workers and socialists whom the wealthy elite decide to “hold accountable” next?

The foul character of this campaign has had an impact on college campuses. Farrow was introduced by Sammy Sussman, a reporter for the *Michigan Daily*, the University of Michigan student newspaper, who wrote a scurrilous article in December 2018 that ended the career of Stephen Shipps, a longtime professor in the School of Music, Theatre & Dance.

The *Daily* article, which resembles a tabloid piece due to its amateurishness and its effort to wring salacious details out of largely innocuous events or unsubstantiated claims, admitted that “no concrete evidence has emerged” to support claims of sexual misconduct against Shipps.

Nevertheless, Shipps was placed on leave and ultimately stepped down.

“My article would never have happened without Ronan’s reporting,” the student said at the March 19 event.

During the question and answer period, a Socialist Equality Party (SEP) supporter said: “I strongly disagree with the presentations tonight. Ronan Farrow began his public career as an accomplice of Richard Holbrooke and Hillary Clinton, responsible for more blood than this lecture hall could hold, in Washington’s naked pursuit of its geopolitical interests in the Middle East and Central Asia, known as the ‘war on terror’—the Democratic Party version.

“Farrow went on to help launch the #MeToo sexual witch hunt, which has further undermined the presumption of innocence and due process and has nothing to do with the conditions of the broad mass of women, working class women in particular. The destruction of lives and careers is a McCarthyite campaign, which has created an atmosphere of intimidation and terror. Ultimately, wider layers of the population will pay for the attack on due process. We are in ‘Scoundrel Time’ again, and Ronan Farrow is one of the chief scoundrels.”

Inexplicably, the last quarter of these critical comments were suppressed by those live streaming the event on YouTube. In any case, Farrow and Auletta were unable to respond to any of these issues and moved on quickly, although they were clearly shaken by the comment.

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