

‘MeToo’ Movement— Comments and Discussion

Roni,

The International Socialist Organization (ISO) situation was instructional, in my view, as to how 'red scares, 'witches,' 'invasions from Mars,' and (in this ISO case) 'sexual assault,' can whip up hysteria that moves beyond reason to assumption of guilt. I don't claim to know what is true or not true in the ISO situation (though my skepticism about the original claims is strong). I think the DSA situation is potentially fascinating. However, I urge that we apply the same skepticism to what we hear on this matter that we apply to everything we hear and read in the 'bourgeois press.'

Rod

Rod and All,

I find myself in direct opposition to Rod's point of view on the 'me too' movement. In my view, this is an important grass-roots movement. Women are sick and tired of being harassed and assaulted by men, especially those holding positions of power.

I understand the feeling that at times this has gone too far and that those accused are not given a chance to defend themselves. I think to start organizations need to create procedures to deal with these issues before the problem arises. Those accused have the right to know the specific charges and to have a hearing before impartial adjudicators, where they are given the opportunity to present their side of the issue. Those bringing charges have the right to know those charges are taken seriously, that the issue will be dealt with expeditiously and that if the accused person is found to have harassed or assaulted another person that person will be suspended for a lengthy period or expelled from the organization.

These are highly volatile issues and devising fair procedures is not easy. Nevertheless, the issue needs to be addressed. Trying to hide complaints just leads to more bitterness and ultimately to splits and mass resignations. Furthermore, if an organization's claim to believe in women's rights is to be taken as more than empty rhetoric then it needs to deal sternly with those members who harass or assault others.

One final point. The ISO issue arose out of a charge of rape. The person making this accusation should have been encouraged to take this complaint to the police. Rape is a serious crime, and the ramifications of it go well beyond the capabilities of an organization such as ISO.

Eric

Eric and All,

Eric writes that he finds himself "in direct opposition to Rod's point of view on the 'me-too' movement." I think Eric and I may have disagreements, but let's try to clarify what we are disagreeing about.

1. I didn't write or express a point of view on the Me-Too movement. I made references, in the context of the ISO situation and possibly the DSA situation, to dangers of 'witch-hunt hysterias.' I will return to this point.

2. I believe (as I am reasonably certain that both Eric and Roni do), that: a) women have been harassed, discriminated against in myriad ways, molested, assaulted, and even murdered *simply for being women* since all history I know began; b) women have raised voices more aggressively that are more frequently (but not always) heard with credibility around the issue of gender assault. (Discussing the why and wherefores for this has taken place in the most recent past and present, including its connections to the positive sea change that has occurred around gender issues generally (gay/straight; male/female; trans, bi-and more) seems quite worthwhile to me.); 3) that the overwhelming thrust of this is to advance issues of social justice. 4) that, to the degree that this is what we are referring to when we speak of the 'Me-Too' movement, these positives hold.

If Eric or anyone else is 'in direct opposition' to the views I just stated, I think it would be very important to discuss these differences. However, I don't think this is where the differences between Eric and me (and perhaps others) lie. What, then, is Eric directly opposing? I think he is opposing my implied criticisms of the Me-Too movement. Assuming this is so, I will make these criticisms more direct, and less implied, in the hopes we can discuss and debate what we actually disagree about. I will also make the case for why these criticisms should be voiced.

1) As Roni alludes to, the Me-Too movement, or elements of that movement, have advanced the view that a woman voicing an allegation of sexual harassment/assault/rape should 'automatically' be believed and, conversely, an accused man should be 'presumed guilty until proven innocent.' With views such as this being made *explicit*, it hardly takes argument to suggest that an unfortunate 'witch-hunt atmosphere' can arise. I am not going to take the time here to explain why these are atrocious notions or why the consequences are devastatingly negative. I will (provocatively) say that it is akin to shooting everyone who has 'bourgeois origins or attitudes.' If someone disagrees, I am happy to have *that* discussion.

2) There are those who might say: "Yes, Rod, but the 'main line of march' is defending against women's oppression. Your criticisms weaken the 'main line of march.'" If anyone on this list believes this is the case, then *let's discuss this*. I come from a political tendency that never thought that opposing US imperialism meant withholding criticisms of Castro or Pol Pot. I come from a tendency that supported the civil rights struggle, but never thought that it should hold back on its criticisms on the limitations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Or the hucksterism of Jesse Jackson. It's a tendency that supported Black nationalism as a legitimate alternative to an Integrationist perspective--but it never thought that it shouldn't say that Louis Farrakhan was an authoritarian, reactionary creep. I could go on. But, if this is the issue, *let's discuss this*.

Rod

Eric and All,

As a follow-up to my previous email, I ask the following:

Do those accused of rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment have the right to defend themselves, and that there should exist fair legal procedures that allow them to do so, and that, as a logical consequence, all "survivors" are not automatically to be believed?

I think it would be helpful to the discussion (not just between Eric and me) to clarify whether this is a difference or not.

Rod

first, and almost as an aside: some form of male on female rape (i.e. "date" rape) is so commonplace as to be an unspoken "rite of passage." it is only now, in the light of #metoo that some of my oldest friends have confided such experiences to me. "I let him have his way with me."

Robin

Hi Robin, Eric, Rod and all,

In general, the "law" should be able deal with it. However, if I killed my rapist it would be hard as hell in our courts to get off on a self-defense plea. So, in a case of rape, we almost always have to believe the women unless there's the facts to prove otherwise.

I still maintain that if a guy is a hugger naturally (hugs guys as well) to accuse him of "he makes me uncomfortable" as a sexual harassment goes too far. #metoo takes it way too far. I don't want a society that goes from objectifying women to harassing men. Are men in general more to blame when it comes to sexual assault under capitalism, yes. However, Tyler Perry and I guess many other men were sexually assaulted, some by men some by women. Capitalism created and continues a patriarchal society. That's the fact and it oppresses everyone men included.

Love you all,

Roni

Hi All,

I think that in the vast majority of cases women who make public accusations of rape and sexual coercion against well-known people should be trusted because they do it in the context of the justified expectation of punishment of being attacked, being publicly denigrated and a lot of sharp scrutiny from the supporters of the accused. Sadly, government agencies, the police, the courts, legislative investigators, etc. are not very respectful or compassionate toward them either, even though there has been small improvements in this area. That being said, I do firmly believe that all accused people deserve the opportunity to defend themselves against false charges.

For me, however, there is another pressing issue, that of how to develop better processes for dealing with cases of sexual harassment and rape in anti-authoritarian and anarchist communities. As it stands now, restorative justice processes are often not really effective in solving problems of this sort, even when several people have direct knowledge of the incident. Also, I definitely don't think that police intervention is helpful, especially since they are not sympathetic to anarchist or other anti-authoritarian groups, and generally wish us harm. That is probably also the case with respect to socialist and social democratic groups.

I know of two cases in which restorative justice was attempted, both people involved were listened to and attempts at reaching understanding and behavior change were made. In both cases the aggressors left the groups they had been involved with. In one case the victim also dropped out. In the other case the victim stayed.

I know that answers are difficult to develop in the context of the current authoritarian macho male dominated society, but I think that discussing possibilities is important.

In Solidarity.

Sylvie
