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Summary: First published on September 30, now with a postscript about the consequences of Kavanaugh's confirmation - Editors

## Ford Takes on Kavanaugh Amid the Revolutionary Ferment of the #MeToo Movement - With a New Postscript

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On Thursday, September 27, many in the US and throughout the world sat riveted to their digital screens as Dr. Christine Blasey Ford and Judge Brett Kavanaugh testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee about their recollections of a night 36 years ago. This was not simply about one accuser facing the man who she claims sexually assaulted her, nor is it just about one man's efforts to get appointed to the highest court in the US. The stakes are much higher than this; that is why it drew world-wide attention.

Marx writes, paraphrasing Hegel, "that great historic facts and personages recur twice. He forgot to add: 'Once as tragedy, and again as farce.'" This is no less true with recent events than when Marx wrote *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, although the farce of today may have its own radical implications for the future. The tragedy of the 1991 testimony of Dr. Anita Hill was that she was grilled by a committee of all male senators about sexual harassment allegations as if she were the perpetrator that had to prove the veracity of her statements, while Clarence Thomas did not face the same level of scrutiny. Moreover, while she was allowed to speak and gave measured and credible testimony, the confirmation of Thomas, and the vile manner in which she was treated by the Senate and the media, was bound to keep many women from publicly accusing powerful men of similar actions, even as nearly every woman from their early teenage years to old age know

of or have themselves experienced sexually aggressive behavior by men. The social, economic, and emotional cost is simply far too high for many. Perhaps one of the only positives that came out of this was that the term “sexual harassment” became part of the public lexicon that could be used by those women and men brave enough to step forward.

With the current hearings, we are entering into a farcical stage; one where the language of #MeToo is touted by both sides, but at least one, if not both sides are completely lacking in an ability to move beyond appearances and actually take women’s statements about sexual violence seriously. On the Republican side, Senator Grassley and others have sought to ram through Kavanaugh’s nomination even as they heard of multiple women’s accusations against him. This rush to judgement came at first without any kind of investigation, then with stipulations that Ford could testify but that she would have to provide that testimony almost immediately so as to not inconvenience the committee and Kavanaugh. Then, when there was a brief delay in the committee’s vote in order to allow the testimony of one of Kavanaugh’s accusers, the partisan and dismissive tone of the opening statement by Grassley, the harsh (though indirect) rebuke of Ford’s credibility by Senator Graham, and the commitment of the Judiciary Committee to vote on confirmation less than twenty-four hours after Ford and

Kavanaugh's testimony point to the fact that Republicans would allow Ford to speak, but not to be heard. The arbitrary one-week deadline and the use of a female sex crimes prosecutor for questioning does little to persuade that the results of these proceedings were anything but predetermined and done for the purposes of putting up a good appearance for the midterm elections. As for the Democrats, it remains to be seen if they will continue to support women's empowerment when the cameras are off or when it could be politically costly to them.

Certainly, there are a number of other reasons to oppose Kavanaugh's nomination, from his stance on executive power, to the contempt that he showed for international law and norms regarding torture during the Bush administration, to his pro-business court rulings, to his rulings and statements on the reproductive rights of women. These proceedings are not a criminal trial where it has to be proved beyond a reasonable doubt that he committed a crime. Instead, it is an investigatory hearing on the president's pick for the Supreme Court to determine the fitness of that nominee to be an unbiased and neutral interpreter of US law. No nominees are entitled to a seat on the court simply because they were nominated, they went to the "right" schools, held prestigious jobs, received the "right" endorsements, or because their previous public record was clean. All aspects of a person's character are

relevant to earning a seat in the highest court in the US. In this light, the seriousness and credibility of these accusations and his pugilistic and partisan testimony are evidence enough of someone who is unfit to serve on the court.

Regardless of the FBI investigation and the final vote in the Senate, the #MeToo movement will continue to fight for the rights of women to be free from the sexual violence that helps to maintain the intertwined hierarchical orders of patriarchy and capitalism. Dr. Ford is just one of many voices speaking in this movement for the innate dignity of all human beings to be free of oppression. In fact, it is very possible that without this worldwide activism, Dr. Ford would have kept this incident to herself and she is not alone. #MeToo has taken hold throughout the world.

In Kenya, hundreds of women marched to demand a criminal investigation into accusations of new mothers being assaulted by National Hospital staff. In Peru, women are protesting the Lima government for ignoring gendered violence, demanding systemic changes to their judicial system. In Pakistan, the rape and murder of a 7-year-old – believed to be the 12<sup>th</sup> child this year alone – has prompted women to come out with their own stories of abuse and march against the state. As a result, the government is considering changing its laws and implementing a sex education curriculum in its public schools. These are only a few examples with of what is truly a world-wide women's

movement from Sweden to China to Saudi Arabia to Chiapas and beyond. Many women are no longer willing to tolerate social practices that excuse men's sexual violence as "boys just being boys" while at the same time criticizing women for evincing any sexual subjectivity and arguing that they are "asking for" sexual violence to be perpetrated against them.

As bleak as things may seem with conservative forces gaining strength throughout the world, it truly appears that women's empowerment is an idea whose time has come. As women of diverse experiences throughout the world speak out and demand change, we have an obligation not only to listen, but also to actually hear them. This means not just rhetorical support and being politically correct, but actively working with progressive women's groups to theorize and build a new society that respects the individuality and innate dignity of each human being regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. The International Marxist-Humanist Organization stands with all of those in the #MeToo movement and beyond seeking to build a truly inclusive, non-hierarchical post-capitalist society.

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Postscript of October 22, 2018

On October 8, Brett Kavanaugh was sworn in as a Justice of the US Supreme Court despite facing multiple allegations of

sexual assault, not to mention allegedly lying to Congress during hearings and engaging in partisan attacks against his detractors. The entire process illustrates the distance that women still have to go to reach that very limited standard of equality with men—a standard that is far from the possibilities of an emancipated individual in a post-capitalist society. Here, a well-educated professional white woman gave extremely credible testimony about an attempted rape and faced ridicule and derision from the Right. Two other well-placed women didn't even get that opportunity and their allegations were nearly summarily dismissed. While partisan motives were clearly involved, it is hard not to see the privilege of an elite white male to the presumption of innocence regardless of the facts. This contrasts with the spate of police shootings of young Black men where their mere presence can be perceived as threatening enough for the use of lethal force. Patriarchal capitalism, with its generous share of racism, is still alive and well.

This is further illustrated by the backlash that occurred after Dr. Ford's testimony where the #hetoo movement came to the fore again. For these individuals, Kavanaugh was just one of many men that had been oppressed by feminists and calls for political correctness. All men and the women that support them should, thus be worried about false accusations of assault—as if women are waiting in line for their chance to take down a man and face the accusation that they “really

wanted it” or that they “asked for it” with their behavior or dress. What these individuals fail to understand (or perhaps in other cases, understand far too well) is that this is really not about being politically correct, but instead it is about women empowering themselves and others to realize that sexual violence is about maintaining hierarchical power and shaming victims into going along with oppressive norms.

#MeToo is a diverse international movement that has led to opportunities for the empowerment of women through acknowledgement of the scope of sexual violence and the need to directly challenge patriarchal assumptions and behaviors. It has been successful where it has opened space to speak about issues of sexual violence and where it has led to progressive activism not just for professional white women, but for all who face threats of sexual violence regardless of race, class, gender or sexuality. Most recently, the movement have now reached India, where thousands of women have united to speak out against dehumanizing sexual harassment. If it is to continue to be a progressive force that challenges the status quo, it not only needs to continue the work of giving voice to those marginalized by sexual violence, but it also needs to reflect on the future that needs to be built. Time after time, we have witnessed the emergence of progressive movements that rightly attack the injustices of the time, but have trouble theorizing an alternative to the oppression that they face. This inability to



theorize a brighter future has led to the downfall of many movements as they either fade away because of lack of enthusiasm or are co-opted by powerful interests. Now is the time to begin theorizing the contours of a truly inclusive, non-hierarchical post-capitalist society.

Approved as Statement of the Steering Committee of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization