

Savage anti-gay witch hunt of TV presenters

Labourite puritans paralysed

BBC presenter Huw Edwards had his life, his career and his mental health shattered in a monstrous media frenzy detonated by the *Sun*. He was pilloried for allegedly paying money to a younger man for photos “of a sexual nature”. The young man’s lawyers refuted the *Sun*’s allegations as “rubbish”. But still the media, including the BBC, ramped up the hysteria. Edwards was investigated by the police and, even though he had not violated this country’s draconian laws criminalising teenage sex, he was suspended and placed under investigation by the BBC.

Edwards is the second high-profile victim of an anti-gay crusade in recent months: ITV presenter Phillip Schofield “lost everything”—his job, his career and his sanity due to a relentless media witch hunt. Like Edwards, Schofield is a handsome, wealthy, gay man in his early 60s. According to moralists this makes him a sexual predator out to corrupt the country’s young men. His crime? He had a consensual affair with a young male colleague, who we are supposed to believe couldn’t possibly have consented. The whole gruesome spectacle is an outrage.

As socialists we unequivocally defend Edwards and Schofield. Sexual activity between individuals is nobody’s business but their own as long as there is effective consent. The state has no business regulating people’s sex lives. And the bosses have no business investigating the private lives of workers. We are opposed to the strategy of the feminist #MeToo movement which appeals to the bosses and the state to enforce puritanical laws in the workplace. We insist workers should go to the union, *not* the company, to fight abuses of power, sexual harassment, racial and all forms of discrimination at work.

Every defender of LGBTQ rights knows that the crushing of these celebrities is part of a broader anti-gay and anti-trans backlash. Liberal spokespeople for these campaigns have objected to these homophobic witch hunts, but their protest is half-hearted. Peter Tatchell noted that the trashing of Schofield had “more than a whiff of homophobia”. Owen Jones condemned the *Sun* for trying to destroy Huw Edwards by making “false claims of illegality involving a minor”. But neither Tatchell nor Jones is willing to say it’s nobody’s business if a wealthy man in his 60s has sex with a young man. Jones wrote that Edwards did nothing illegal, but the BBC “should investigate any other relevant allegations”. He is trying to

claim the same moral ground that was used to snare Edwards and Schofield and so his defence of them is hamstrung by his acceptance of the bourgeoisie’s moral codes. Jones upholds the employer’s right to police the private sexual behaviour of the workforce and the draconian laws that can have you thrown in jail or placed on the sex offender’s register for having sex under 16 or exchanging sex pics under 18. This is what comes of liberal campaigners for LGBTQ rights having spent decades restricting the struggle to what is compatible with bourgeois respectability, abandoning the goal of gay liberation and embracing conservative “family values”.

The reformist left is shamelessly puritanical. *Socialist Worker* (30 May) published a letter on Schofield which rightly proclaims “no to homophobia” but also denounces “the rich and powerful flaunting the rules and engaging in unethical practices”. The “rules” that these socialists regard as sacrosanct are set by the exploiting class! To be consistent in their embrace of Victorian moral values, the SWP should condemn Oscar Wilde who “flaunted the rules” of bourgeois morality and was convicted for the very “unethical” activity of paying rent boys for sex.

We revolutionaries vehemently oppose the moral codes of the ruling class because they are chains forged by the bourgeoisie to shackle the proletariat. Sexual morality, racial prejudice and servility to the monarchy are weapons the ruling class uses to drum up reaction and keep the working class obedient and subservient to their class rule. Every concession to bourgeois morality by reformists and union leaders opens the door for the bosses to mobilise the most backward prejudices to divide and weaken the working class and obstructs the struggle for social liberation from their masters.

It is no coincidence that these weekly sex scandals are happening in the wake of the defeat and betrayal of the public sector strikes at the hands of the slavishly pro-capitalist union leaders. This will add to the increasingly reactionary climate and increase genuine fears among sexual minorities. The struggles in defence of immigrants, racial minorities, for the rights of women and other oppressed sexual groups must go hand-in-hand with the struggle for social and economic emancipation of the working class. All these struggles must be united under a single banner fighting for socialism in unyielding opposition to liberalism and Labour reformism. ■