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Women

The #MeToo Revolution

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The revelations just keep coming. They began at the top, as actresses charged the powerful Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, actor Kevin Spacey and comedian Louis CK of rape and various forms of sexual harassment. They soon implicated major TV network personalities, corporate executives and political figures from both capitalist parties.

In the past, when a woman came forward she stood alone, facing a barrage of interrogators. This time, within 24 hours of #MeToo being re-launched on Facebook, 4.7 million people around the world responded with their stories of how men used their position to intimidate and bully women and even children – especially in workplace and prisons, but also within the family.

Will this be different than all the other moments in which sexual abuse was revealed?

We think yes, that this time the level of consciousness and solidarity is deeper. It's not just high-profile powerful male celebrities who have been exposed. Sexual abuse is a much broader issue in workplaces throughout society, where victims and survivors risk their jobs, careers and economic survival if they dare to speak out. And organized labor can play a big role in demanding a harassment-free environment, merging this movement with the struggle for decent wages.

That's why the statement that Latina farmworkers from the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas wrote for the November 12 "Take Back the Workplace" march in Los Angeles hits the nail on the head.

"We write on behalf of the approximately 700,000 women who work in the agricultural fields and packing sheds across the United States. For the past several weeks we have watched and listened with sadness as we have learned of the actors, models and other individuals who have come forward to speak out about the gender based violence they've experienced at the hands of bosses, coworkers and other powerful people in the entertainment industry. We wish that we could say we're shocked to learn that this is such a pervasive problem in your industry. Sadly, we're not surprised because it's a reality we know far too well. Countless farmworker women across our country suffer in silence because of the widespread sexual harassment and assault that they face at work.

"We do not work under bright stage lights or on the big screen. We work in the shadows of society in isolated fields and packinghouses that are out of sight and out of mind for most people in this country. Your job feeds souls, fills hearts and spreads joy. Our job nourishes the nation with the fruits, vegetables and other crops that we plant, pick and pack.

"Even though we work in very different environments, we share a common experience of being preyed upon by individuals who have the power to hire, fire, blacklist and otherwise threaten our economic, physical and emotional security. Like you, there are few positions available to us and reporting any kind of harm or injustice committed against us doesn't seem like a viable option. Complaining about anything – even sexual harassment – seems unthinkable because too much is at risk, including the ability to feed our families and preserve our reputations.

"We understand the hurt, confusion, isolation and betrayal that you might feel. We also carry shame and fear resulting from this violence. It sits on our backs like oppressive weights. But, deep in our hearts we know that it is not our fault. The only people at fault are the individuals who choose to abuse their power to harass, threaten and harm us, like they have harmed you.

The #MeToo Revolution

“In these moments of despair, and as you cope with scrutiny and criticism because you have bravely chosen to speak out against the harrowing acts that were committed against you, please know that you’re not alone. We believe and stand with you.”

The unity that is being forged and a growing awareness of how racism reinforces the power dynamic is truly a sea change, and the sign of a revolution that’s only just begun.

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