

June 10, 2019

To Fightback Montreal,

We are a collective that have organized the anti-racist demonstrations of November 12th 2017, October 7th 2018, and recently the 24th of March 2019. We are antiracist activists from different organizations who got together to organize against hate and racism. When we were deciding on speakers for this most recent demonstration, someone from Fightback who was at our meeting suggested that Fightback be one of the speakers. On the 19th of March, it came to our attention that there were problems of sexual misconduct within Fightback that have not been sufficiently dealt with. When we asked one of the Fightback member about it, he sent us an article¹ which confirmed how Fightback did not take action with regards these issues and the article showed a lack of reflection on the part of Fightback related to the problematic practices flagged by various people in Toronto and elsewhere² and a defensive stance that portrayed accusations of sexual violence as hurtful to the Left.

It should be noted that most of us had no prior extensive contact with Fightback or any ill will towards Fightback's politics. Our reticence and critique was primarily motivated by our disdain for culture that does not discourage upfront any practices that are not feminist and intersectional (fighting against patriarchy and misogyny as we fight against class, for instance).

The article¹ was a response to allegations of sexual misconduct, however Fightback's response in the letter was defensive at best:

"With regard to the non-specific allegations, Fightback takes this question very, very seriously. Any manifestation of harassment, sexual or otherwise, is totally unacceptable. Any instance of harassment is immediately investigated and proportionate action taken. We have conducted an internal review to determine if there are any instances of harassment that could in any way be related to the non-specific allegations. We have found nothing. If we had found anything we would have taken immediate action against any culpable individuals. The fact that the allegations are unspecified does not help. We do not know what is alleged, against whom, on what date, at what location."

"We have approached independent groups and individuals to see if they could investigate and/or mediate to resolve this dispute. Unfortunately this has been denied to us."

This and the above articles overall clearly show that Fightback did not engage in internal reflections following the allegations. Rather Fightback has painted the situation as a matter of coming down hard on a singular bad apple rather than acknowledging a systemic issue. It is obvious that the survivors of the sexual misconduct do not always have the luxury to come out openly and make themselves further vulnerable due to various levels of privilege and power

¹ <https://www.marxist.ca/canada/ontario/1443-an-appeal-against-sectarianism-whisper-campaign-weakens-york-university-left.html>

² https://www.marxist.ca/2-uncategorised/1519-group-attacks-fightback-in-ottawa-as-fascists-target-toronto-chapter-our-reply.html?fbclid=IwAR2_ctROy_fIDcbouRtJ-n19Okp0Pj1Ko-awtN-1hTnUw1ivRBnk6XP_Q18

dynamics associated in any such situation. In most cases, revealing the aggressor's name or the circumstances of the aggression is just as threatening to a survivor's safety as revealing their own identity. The response of Fightback shows that the survivors in this case are not heard and their concerns are not taken seriously. One does not need to wait for specific information in such cases to do more introspection of one's practices and culture that may allow problematic behaviours to flourish.

Needless to say, the article did not convince us, and this led to an internal debate in our group on whether we should let Fightback give a speech during the demonstration or not.

Additionally, some people have told us that after they gave their contact information (for newsletter, for instance) to Fightback recruiters during demonstrations and such, they were contacted by individuals and felt like they were being asked on a date and invited to places where alcohol was consumed. These people felt really uneasy about such practices, even if it may have been one of the steps in the recruitment process. Members of our group were uncomfortable to work with Fightback for this reason as well, which can be construed as part of rape culture – situations that encourage unconsensual sexual relations. Similar culture is exhibited in the articles mentioned above where warning signs of aggression are not taken seriously.

While some of us felt that giving a voice to Fightback was leaving the survivors of the alleged sexual misconduct behind, we agreed to have Fightback speak at the demo. This was in particular due to the fact that we did not have enough time to go to the bottom of the issue, and we erred on the side of caution.

Since the demonstration we had a chance to debrief and take time to investigate this further and we all confirmed our discomfort towards continuing to work with Fightback. In this perspective, we decided that before we continue to work with Fightback and give them a voice at our demonstrations, Fightback really needs to recognize that the way they handled the allegations was not sufficient, even if they were non-specific allegations. Furthermore, Fightback needs to take significant steps to address their practices and culture that may be encouraging (or not discouraging) the behaviours that were denounced. This is the reason why we are taking time to write to you with some recommendations of actions that can be taken to improve these and to move towards adopting anti-oppressive policies and practices.

Here are some recommendations to begin with:

- **Hold internal discussions:** In order to reflect upon the practices and culture of the organization we strongly encourage you to hold discussions internally to introspect and reflect on what has been brought forth here in this letter and elsewhere that your articles refer to; you might want to dig deep and identify any problematic practices and patterns in light of the elements discussed above.

- **Survey current and former members:** We understand that there were no specific denunciations until now but it was clear that Fightback's organisational culture was being criticised. We suggest that, in order to address this situation, Fightback conducts a survey about the experience of Fightback (ex-)members in order to get clarity on different discrimination and harassment problems people may have encountered in Fightback. Please see the sample survey attached to our mail.

- **Recruitment practices:** We would like to recommend that there would be clear and standardized guidelines within the organisation that specifies the ethics of recruitment and code of conduct to be followed in the process of recruitment that includes elements of safety for all, such as: recruiters should not use contact information of people who have signed up for their own personal reasons; people who are about to give their contact information should be told how their information would be used, so they can choose if they are still willing to give it or not; the procedure to follow to contact the new recruit should be laid out clearly, and that it is not done as if the recruit is taken out on a date and that the meetings with the recruit are in a public or semi-public place without alcohol and that it should not be a one-on-one meeting.

- **Complaint procedures:** Survivors of sexual assault or harassment of any sort may not want to come out openly and identify their aggressor or detail what happened as much as they wouldn't want to make themselves known publicly for obvious reasons - there is still a stigma attached to it and fear of being subjected to further violence, harassment, or exclusion. In fact putting so much pressure in knowing details of a sexual misconduct/abuse, as shown in the letter¹ reinforces rape culture as it gives a green signal to perpetrators of sexual misconduct - they could continue with their practices given that any action against them isn't forthcoming; such a culture also retraumatizes survivors of sexual misconduct, especially if no concrete support is offered to said survivors.

We recommend that you put in place a complaint procedure that can facilitate the process of reporting misconducts while remaining safe and relatively anonymous. Here are some questions to ask internally as you design the complaint procedures: What are the existing procedures to put in a complaint about sexual misconducts? Are there any? Are there people whose role is to take care of this? Have these people been properly trained to deal with cases of sexual misconduct? Is there a way to make sure that the people who are supposed to take care

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of this are not involved in the dynamics at play; that there is not conflict of interest? Do they take into account the power relations that may deter survivors to report the incidents they have faced? What is planned to make sure that the victims reporting these incidents do not face repercussions from the organization and other members? Are there anonymous procedures of complaint that could lead to an inquiry so that the survivor doesn't have to give their name in order to be heard?

Additionally, it is imperative that Fightback remove the defensive and dismissive statements/letters from the Marxist.ca website as soon as possible. We encourage you to write a statement that acknowledges the problems in your previous statements and publish a new one explaining what you are working on going forward. Even if you are not in a position to publish it on the cross-country website, we urge you to use Fightback's Montreal platform(s) to do so.

We hope that you take our concerns into consideration and do the work of self-reflection and adjustment of practices. If you would like references to resources for facilitation, for reflections or for setting up any of the systems mentioned above, we may be able to provide some.

Sincerely,

Collective against hate and racism