

Dear Jake,

Some months ago, after an industry event, you made some inappropriate comments to me along the lines that my contribution to Verso was that “we needed someone else nice to look at” or words to that effect. I don’t necessarily want to try to reenact the entire conversation. It was a long time ago, we were both drinking, there were no observers, and neither of us can produce a transcript of what exactly was said by whom. However, to the best of my recollection, you were the one to initiate this conversation, and it was in the context of my professional development at the company, that I needed to find my “thing” that I excelled at.

To me, the crux of the issue that you are my boss and I am an employee. Not any employee, but the newest (both to the company and to the Left), lowest-paid employee with the fewest resources, the least education, the fewest accomplishments, the fewest connections, and the most to prove--not to mention the only woman of color on full-time staff--and I don’t think my sensibility of this has exactly been a secret. You do not depend on me for your livelihood, for your professional development, or for your confidence needed to be an effective worker. I do not have the power to fire you, promote you, give you a raise, deny you professional opportunities, or guide you in your work. Whatever happened that night, however I might have responded, was directly informed by that dynamic.

This has greatly impacted my ability to work. It is extremely demoralizing to feel that you, someone I look to not only for my ability to survive, but also for professional guidance and development, views me in such a demeaning way. I am now excessively conscious of my subordinate position, and I feel, very acutely, that you would not have behaved that way if I were more well-established with more resources and connections. It is a terrible feeling. I feel that you behaved that way because you could, and because the consequences for me, more than virtually anyone else, far outweigh any consequences you might face. The fact that this has weighed on me for months and seemingly barely affected you at all is testament to this. It has shattered the confidence I need to do my work. Moreover, now I have to worry that even seeking some kind of justice will negatively impact me materially or professionally. I cannot emphasize enough how this has made even coming into the office difficult for me. This job is stressful enough and I shouldn’t even have to deal with these issues on top of it.

I hope this has made clear why I am seeking an apology. I would like to put this behind us and proceed as colleagues and comrades, but I cannot do that without a sincere apology and acknowledgement of these things from you. Specifically, I would like to see the following things happen:

A meeting with you, Duncan, and Anne to discuss this, and a verbal apology

A written apology which addresses the power dynamics at play, the way this has affected me, my role within the company, and your relationship to it.

An all-staff meeting in the near future to fully flesh out and formalize our sexual harassment policy, with concrete action points to address educating the staff about sexual harassment, what our rights are, and what mechanisms are in place to hold people accountable. Some ideas I have include regular trainings,

addressing the gender disparity within the company, and a full exploration of what measures are in place to prevent retaliation.