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The Audacious Hypocrisy of the Washington Post



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Last week, the Washington Post audaciously posted a lead editorial that warned about “A threat to First Amendment Rights.” For the past six months, the Post has been conducting its own assault on the First Amendment, despite a daily masthead that proclaims “Democracy Dies in Darkness.” Jeff Bezos, the Post’s owner has censored editorials and even an editorial cartoon. As a result, the cartoonist and several prominent editorial writers have resigned from the paper. Many staffers have left as well, and several hundred thousand subscriptions have been canceled. Conversely, during Donald Trump’s first campaign for the presidency, the Post wrote a series of six editorials outlining the “clear and present danger of Donald Trump” with no complaints from Bezos or his senior editors.

There was a similar series of events at the Los Angeles Times, whose editor—Patrick Soon-Shiong—is heavily dependent on support from the Trump administration. Soon-Shiong proclaimed that the paper’s editorial writers were “very left” and that he wanted the paper to be more “middle of the road.” Bezos and Soon-Shiong are heavily dependent on support

from government agencies for the billions of dollars they earn in the fields of satellite technology and medical technology, respectively. They are particularly intimidated by the pressure the Trump administration and the Federal Communications Commission are placing on such networks as CBS, ABC, NPR, and PBS.

Bezos's truckling to Trump began in the run up to the November election, when Bezos made the eleventh-hour decision to kill a lead editorial endorsing Kamala Harris for president. Bezos's publisher and chief executive officer, Will Lewis—one of several toadies appointed by Bezos—said that the paper was returning to its roots of having no endorsements in presidential races, but that was one of the many lies and obfuscations the Post hierarchy has used to defend its policy of censorship. Several hundred thousand subscribers cancelled their subscriptions, and two senior columnists—Robert Kagan and Michele Norris—resigned.

In the wake of Trump's electoral victory, Bezos immediately began his campaign to kiss the ring of the next resident of the White House, donating \$1 million to Trump's inauguration festivities. Bezos told the New York Times that Trump was a changed man, "calmer...more confident, more settled." Obviously, Trump's troglodytes, like Trump himself, are capable of willful self-delusion despite all evidence to the contrary.

When the Pulitzer-prize winning cartoonist, Ann Telnaes, lampooned Bezos's dinner at Mar-a-Lago with Donald and Melania, the editor of the editorial page, David Shipley, censored it, claiming in bizarre fashion that it was "duplicative." Post cartoonists, such as Herblock and Tom Toles over the years were often "duplicative" of editorials and opeds without raising the hackles of management. Shipley's act of censorship was the signal that editorial writers, like the editorial cartoonist, were going to have problems with Jeff Bezos.

In the wake of the Telnaes affair, an important editorial writer, Jennifer Rubin, left the paper, and the media critic Erik Wemple, had a piece killed. Next to leave was Ruth Marcus, who had been at the Post for four decades and, since the retirement of Linda Greenhouse at the Times, was the most influential writer in the mainstream media on the Supreme Court. (Marcus has been an apologist for Israel over the years, but her legal writings have been outstanding) The fact that the publisher killed the Marcus piece was unprecedented; the fact that he refused to meet with Marcus was pusillanimous.

Marcus's "crime" against the Post was to criticize Bezos's edict that the editorial pages would focus only on "personal liberties and free markets," which is a fundamentally libertarian position. Many of Trump's oligarchs are, of course, libertarians, who want an end to government regulation, if not government itself. Many of the think-tanks that support Trump, such as the Cato Institute, American Enterprise Institute, and the Heritage

Foundation, are essentially libertarian institutes that want to restrict government agencies. Bezos added that any viewpoints that challenge or oppose the twin pillars of personal liberty and free markets can be “published by others.” Bezos’s demands are a blatant condescension to the Donald, and a threat to the First Amendment above all. As New York Times’ columnist David Brooks said, the “opinion section in the Washington Post...does not brook dissent, that’s just not journalism.”

It’s also “not journalism” to reject ads that challenge the editorial position of a particular paper. In February, an ad from Common Cause and the Southern Poverty Law Center, which had a signed contract with the Post at the cost of \$115,000, was rejected simply because it asked “Who’s running this country: Donald Trump or Elon Musk?” Obviously, Bezos’s front-row seat at Trump’s inauguration meant that the pandering to the president would involve every aspect of the publication of the Post.

The conventional wisdom framed the Post over the years as a liberal newspaper, which ignored the conservative luminaries who continue to dominate the editorial pages. Twenty years ago, it was the conservative work of George Will, the late Michael Gerson, and the late Charles Krauthammer. Today, it is the conservative writings of George Will, Max Boot, Marc Thiessen, and David Ignatius. Thiess and Ignatius are the mainstream media’s leading apologists for Trump and the Central Intelligence Agency and its covert action, respectively. Even during the halcyon days of Woodward and Bernstein in the 1970s as well as Ben Bradlee in the 1980s, the Post had a conservative streak that catered to the president, whether Republican or Democratic.

The Post’s support for the lies of the Bush administration to use force against Iraq was particularly appalling with every one of the paper’s editorial and oped writers supporting the war and buying into the disinformation regarding Iraq and weapons of mass destruction. As recently as March 15th, Marc Thiess was given nearly an entire page to defend the Trump administration’s mugging of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office last month and Trump’s hugging of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The conservative views of the Post are no threat to our civil society. The same cannot be said of the censorship at the Post and the pandering to the most dangerous president in the history of the United States.

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