Sulzbergers pass gilded baton at the New York Times

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Arthur Gregg "A.G." Sulzberger, the new publisher of the *New York Times*, addressed a statement to *Times* readers on January 1 after assuming the helm of the American political establishment's so-called "newspaper of record."

Sulzberger, 37, is taking over the position from his father, Arthur Sulzberger Jr., who in turn inherited the position from his own father in 1992. The post had previously been occupied by A.G. Sulzberger's great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather.

A Sulzberger has been publisher of the *New York Times* since 1935. Over the course of more than eight decades, the newspaper has developed an ever closer integration into the US capitalist state apparatus, even as the quality of its journalism has steadily declined.

This latest transition had an air of haste about it. It was just in October 2016 that A.G. Sulzberger was tapped as deputy publisher. At the time, a spokesperson for the newspaper said that Arthur Sulzberger Jr., then 65, had not announced any plan to retire, and that there would be "a significant period of transition" before the father passed on his job to his son. There was no explanation as to why that "significant period" was reduced to a bare 14 months.

There was also little public fanfare over the change at the top of the most prominent US newspaper. What articles did appear consisted largely of sycophantic puff pieces praising the new Sulzberger, who now has the power to make or break journalistic careers.

One of the few critical articles appeared on *The Intercept* website, which noted that in his apprenticeship as a *Times* reporter, the young Sulzberger had written an article that was embraced by the right-wing Republican governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, during his suppression of the mass protest movement against his austerity measures and attacks on the state's public sector workers in 2011. Walker urged his political allies to distribute the piece, which sought out workers to denounce public employees for failing to "share in the sacrifice" imposed by corporate layoffs and wage-cutting in the private sector.

A.G.'s father, Arthur Sulzberger Jr., presided over some of the most shameful episodes in the history of the *Times*. His tenure coincided with the quarter-century of uninterrupted US imperialist wars, from the Balkans to Iraq, Libya, Syria and beyond, all of which the newspaper justified and supported.

He was publisher when *Times* senior reporter Judith Miller propagandized the lies about "weapons of mass destruction" and fabricated ties between Baghdad and Al Qaeda that were used to foist the 2003 war against Iraq onto the American people. Under his stewardship, a stable of editorial commentators, among them the ineffable Thomas Friedman, were employed to cloak every US war of aggression under the false mantles of "human rights," "democracy" and the "war on terror."

The cost of these wars is numbered in the millions of dead and wounded, the tens of millions turned into homeless refugees and entire regions of the globe reduced to chaos and destruction. The *Times*, in its role as the leading purveyor of war propaganda and the trendsetter for the national media, and Sulzberger personally as its publisher, have blood on their hands.

Former *Times* reporter James Risen has provided a fresh exposure of the newspaper's role in an article titled "The Biggest Secret: My Life as a New York Times Reporter in the Shadow of the War on Terror," which documents the collaboration of the *Times*' publisher and editors with the US government in suppressing articles exposing the false intelligence used to justify the Iraq war and the massive domestic spying

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conducted by the National Security Agency.

More recently, the paper has turned even further to the right, leading the media warmongering against Russia over allegations of Moscow's so-called "meddling" in the US elections. This has been combined, on the one hand, with a campaign to justify state efforts to prohibit, blacklist and suppress speech, particularly on the Internet, and, on the other, with a neo-McCarthyite-style campaign over alleged sexual misconduct in the entertainment industry, the arts, the media and politics that has shredded the careers and lives of a growing number of individuals, without the slightest regard for due process.

A.G. Sulzberger's New Year's Day statement leaves no doubt that he will preside over an even further lurch to the right.

It invokes the words of his great-great-grandfather to proclaim the newspaper's determination to report the news "without fear or favor" and to "invite intelligent discussion from all shades of opinion." His father cited the same passages in what amounted to a postelection apology to the Trump camp for the paper's blatantly pro-Clinton coverage prior to November 8, 2016. He promised to treat the incoming administration, the most right-wing in American history, "without bias" and to cover Trump's reactionary "agenda fairly."

A.G. Sulzberger's January 1 statement goes on to warn that "a dangerous confluence of forces is threatening the press's central role in helping people understand and engage with the world around them."

First he cites the erosion of the corporate media's "business model," which has forced it to cut staff and "scale back their ambitions," something in which the *Times* itself has ruthlessly engaged, including the elimination of over 100 copy editors' positions last summer.

He continues: "Misinformation is rising and trust in the media is declining as technology platforms elevate clickbait, rumor and propaganda over real journalism, and politicians jockey for advantage by inflaming suspicion of the press. Growing polarization is jeopardizing even the foundational assumption of common truths, the stuff that binds a society together."

If "trust in the media is declining," it is for very good reason, as exemplified by the lies and propaganda of the *Times*. The "real journalism" as practiced by the likes of Judith Miller, Thomas Friedman, et al. has provided a powerful impetus for people to look elsewhere.

The "growing polarization" that Sulzberger the younger laments is not an ideological construct, but the objective social reality of a society in which three American billionaires control more wealth than 50 percent of the country's population. Under these conditions, the old "common truths" that have been the stock-in-trade of the *Times* cannot hold, and Internet "technology platforms" have allowed people to seek alternatives to the "official story" of state propaganda peddled by the *Times* and other corporate media.

In inheriting his father's job, Sulzberger has gained a position that in 2016 provided over $5.1 million in annual compensation. He is determined to defend that wealth, even as he is driven by major stockholders, including Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim, who owns the largest number of common shares, to maximize corporate profits.

A.G. Sulzberger's nepotistic rise to the position of *Times* publisher—beating out two of his cousins—was paved in part by his role in the drafting of a 2014 internal document known as the "Innovation Report," which advocated sweeping changes in the *Times* "business model" to promote its "digital evolution" to compete online for readers and advertisers. There is no doubt that this "evolution" will involve further attacks on the jobs and conditions of *Times* employees.

The scramble for profit and the defense of personal wealth aligns Sulzberger and the *Times* seamlessly with the drive by the capitalist state to impose censorship on the Internet and to blacklist sites opposing war and social inequality, first and foremost the *World Socialist Web Site*. They see in Internet censorship a means to both regain their ability to manufacture the so-called "common truths" that mask the class divisions in society, and to restore their profitability and market share.

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