

Behind the hue and cry over the firing of Canadian news anchor Lisa LaFlamme

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Millions of workers across Canada are struggling to cope with soaring prices, an impending eighth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic produced by the ruling class' profit before lives policy, and the looming threat of a third world war triggered by the US/NATO proxy war with Russia, in which Canadian imperialism is playing a leading role. Yet if one were to base one's judgement on what troubles the corporate media, the upper middle-class champions of identity politics and their backers among Canada's billionaire financial oligarchy, one would have to conclude that the firing of 58-year-old Lisa LaFlamme from her post as the chief news anchor of Canadian private television broadcaster CTV's nightly "National News" is the most burning injustice of our time.

CTV's parent company, Bell Media, effectively admitted in a series of clumsy communications that LaFlamme's dismissal last month was based on superficial criteria and concerns, including possibly her age, appearance, and gender "identity." LaFlamme stopped dyeing her hair during the pandemic, in the same manner that some professional men grew long hair or beards. Her boss, Michael Melling, sent a memo inquiring "who had approved the decision to let Lisa's hair go grey?" noting on set that it "looked purple" under studio lighting. Following furious denunciations of "sexism" and "ageism" by LaFlamme supporters, Bell Media responded with an anodyne statement that "it had decided to go in a different direction" in the form of a younger Muslim man, Omar Sachedina.

That LaFlamme should be fired based on the same superficial ratings and above-all profit-driven criteria on which she was hired two decades ago is unsurprising. Broadcast news is more show business than genuine journalism. Decisions about the hirings and firings of ruling class propagandists—for this is what LaFlamme and her replacement are—invariably are made on a highly impressionistic basis relating to the persona (appearance, charm, personal warmth, and gravitas or lack thereof) of the show's anchor/"star" and the image that the network wants to project. In respect to the latter, gender and racial-ethnic identity have become ever more important selection criteria.

However, the swapping of one "identity" for another in front of the cameras in a corporate-controlled newsroom has, in LaFlamme's case, triggered a moral outcry from the upper middle-class race and gender hysterics who haunt academia, the commentariat, and the management tiers of corporate capitalism. In LaFlamme's dismissal, these elements see a shadow cast over their own path towards the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Hiring or firing based on identity is an abomination—unless they or one of their ilk get the job.

On Saturday, August 27, two pages of the front section of the *Globe and Mail*, Canada's so-called newspaper of record, were given over to an "open letter" to Bell Media that claimed LaFlamme's firing "struck at the heart of ... who we are as Canadians," and demanded the multi-billion corporation "make things right" for its now defrocked anchor. The "open letter" was signed not just by the usual suspects like *Toronto Star* columnist Rosie DiManno and country singer Jan Arden, but also by

leading members of the Canadian political establishment and financial oligarchy. These included: Lloyd Axworthy, a former foreign minister and leading architect of the "human rights" imperialist "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine; Maureen McTeer, the wife of former Tory Prime Minister Joe Clark; and former Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne.

Attesting to the crucial role identity politics now plays in ruling class politics, including in providing political cover for Canadian imperialism's intrigues and wars, several billionaires, such as Heather Reisman, chief executive of the Indigo retail chain, and Blackberry co-founder Jim Balsillie, signed the "open letter." It concluded with a note saying its publication, which must have cost tens, if not hundreds of thousands, dollars "was made possible by the generosity" of Margaret Norrie McCain and Eleanor McCain, respectively widow and daughter of McCain Foods empire founder, Wallace McCain.

In addition to the open letter, there have been numerous screeching articles, to say nothing of angry tweets and other social media posts, written in full "I am Spartacus/I am Lisa LaFlamme" mode.

Canadian playwright Brad Fraser, along with tens of thousands of other well-heeled crusaders, declared his intent to stop watching the right-leaning CTV National News forthwith.

One wonders where Fraser's political sensibilities were when Lisa LaFlamme was stupefying her slightly sleepy 11 p.m. CTV audience with happy tales of Canada's "just war" during the brutal neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan, or its arming of Ukrainian Nazis. There is a sense among the upper middle class that LaFlamme was somehow entitled to anchor the news program for decades, into her senescence. If these people believe in anything, they believe in a good sinecure.

The dismissal of LaFlamme was no doubt prejudicial and superficial—but so too is the entire corporate newsroom shuck and jive in which LaFlamme has been engaged her entire professional life.

She joined CTV in 1997 as a weekend anchor, and was rapidly promoted to parliamentary correspondent, becoming the back-up anchor for Lloyd Robertson, whom she succeeded upon his retirement. LaFlamme was entrusted with telling the most politically sensitive "stories" for Canada's ruling class: the September 11 attacks, the Afghan war, the Arab Spring, Canada's intervention after the 2011 Haiti earthquake, the Trump presidency and its culmination in the January 6, 2021 attempted coup, and the Conservative-instigated far-right Freedom Convoy siege of Ottawa. As a trusted custodian of ruling class ideology, she was permitted to interview Canada's top politicians, and members of the British Royal Family. For her loyalty as a ruling class toady, which included her role as spokesperson for the government-funded Canadian Women for Afghan Women NGO, LaFlamme was awarded the Order of Canada in 2019.

LaFlamme expressed her regret over her dismissal in a statement, saying, "At 58, I still thought I'd have a lot more time to tell more of the stories that impact our daily lives. Instead, I leave CTV humbled by the people who put their faith in me to tell their story."

The “people who put their faith” in LaFlamme to “tell their stories” are not working people but the corporate bosses of Bell Media—itsself a subsidiary of BCE, for decades one of Canada’s largest corporations—and the ruling class as whole. Her “journalism” therefore necessarily contained more than its fair share of obfuscations and outright lies, told because the truth would harm the interests of Canadian capitalism and its state.

There is not a single significant issue over the past quarter century in which LaFlamme stood in opposition to the powers that be. Or even a single instance in which she played an important role in exposing political wrongdoing or corporate malfeasance—as journalists were once upon a time expected to do. Disagreements between LaFlamme and CTV management prior to her departure only underscore this fact. She clashed with her bosses at CTV over her demand for the dispatch of an on-the-spot reporting team to cover Queen Elizabeth’s platinum jubilee, so as to provide a “uniquely Canadian” perspective to this lavish, medieval event—a proposal which CTV apparently rejected on cost grounds.

It is instructive to compare the outraged response of Canada’s privileged middle class to LaFlamme’s departure with the utter indifference and outright hostility towards Julian Assange, a genuine journalist who has suffered ruthless persecution at the hands of the imperialist powers for over a decade. Assange exposed systematic war crimes by US imperialism and its allies in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, most famously in the “Collateral murder” video in which US soldiers were seen indiscriminately gunning down civilians. When Assange was forced to seek political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy to escape the clutches of his American, British, and Swedish persecutors, the same people now on the war path for “justice” for LaFlamme either kept silent, or penned despicable articles cynically advising Assange on “how to be a better house guest.”

The crusading upper middle-class elements are not about to let truth or principles get in the way of their ruthless competition for access to privileges within the capitalist system on the basis of race, gender and identity.

What drives their moralizing appeals to “diversity,” feminism and gender politics is their desire for economic advancement through a redistribution of wealth and privilege within the top 5 or 10 percent of society. The newspapers and the pseudo-left journals are full of appeals to corporations to bestow “equity” from on high, and to the magical, “transformative” properties of hair colour and gender, which are their jealously guarded bits of private property for sale to the highest bidder.

When Unilever and Wendy’s sought to leverage the furor over LaFlamme’s firing with opportunist advertising campaigns promoting grey hair, the upper middle class lost no time investing this shameless profiteering with progressive political significance. Unilever-owned Dove launched a “Keep the Grey” campaign, while Wendy’s temporarily changed the hair colour of its mascot, while retaining the subliminal text “mom” in the collar.

The social layers enthused by such garbage cannot imagine “progress,” if that is the appropriate word to use here, coming any other way than through the corporate boardroom. P.K. Mutch, writing for the pseudo-left Rabble.ca, expects female executives at Bell Canada Enterprises to step in for social justice, commenting, “Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE) owns Bell Media which in turn owns and operates CTV, as well as brands like Noovo, TSN, RDS, Crave, and iHeartRadio. The whole kit and kaboodle of media brands and distribution enterprises are governed by the BCE board which as of today is made up of 13 directors, five of which are women all of which are over 55 and none have visible grey hair.... These five women could join forces, re-imagine conventional board protocols, and raise a little collective hell.”

Perhaps if the board has some spare time after spending their days enabling fascistic fringe elements to rant against anti-COVID public

health measures on the nightly news, covering up COVID deaths and the crisis in public hospitals, commanding workers to accept a dramatic pay cut and toil without complaint in unsafe environments, and urging everyone to cheer on the prospect of our own deaths in World War III with China and Russia, five female millionaires will “raise some collective hell.” The very real hell for working people which BCE executives have been justifying with their “news stories” for some time is evidently not the “hell” which concerns P.K. Mutch.

It is, however, the hell that concerns us.

One senses that capitalist culture in Canada has reached a dead end. Neither the newspapers, nor the nightly news, or even the most prominent artists are able to honestly describe the real situation, let alone provide a way out of it. They are preoccupied with their own appearances and policing correct speech in the same way the court of Louis XVI was obsessed with the correct formulation of bon mots.

Bourgeois politics is moving, or rather being pushed, rapidly to the political right. Every faction of the bourgeoisie is complicit. The trade unions and the New Democrats prop up a government waging imperialist war abroad, and warfare on the working class at home. But we are told to fret about a hiccup in a millionaire’s career, because the millionaire is a woman.

The real purposes of identity politics—to provide a “progressive” gloss to right-wing, anti-worker policies and secure the careers of a privileged minority—are on full display in Justin Trudeau’s Cabinet, where half the portfolios are in female hands. This includes, as laudatory commentary in the corporate media has noted, the three ministers apart from Trudeau himself most responsible for Canadian imperialism’s highly provocative role in the NATO proxy war on Russia: Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, Global Affairs Minister Melanie Joly, and Defense Minister Anita Anand.

Among the many stories Laflamme helped bury during her tenure as CTV’s top “journalist” was the longstanding alliance between the Canadian state and the Ukrainian far-right. This alliance is embodied in the person of no other than Deputy Prime Minister Freeland whose “beloved grandfather” was a prominent Nazi World War II collaborator and supporter of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).

Female capitalist politicians are some of the most vicious warmongers on the planet today. They include German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, whose speeches justify the biggest German rearmament program since Hitler with homilies to “human rights,” Finland’s Prime Minister Sanna Marin, and Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas. Liz Truss, who will likely soon be Britain’ Prime Minister, has declared her readiness to destroy the world with nuclear weapons, in order to prove to the British ruling class that its imperial interests are safe in her cold, unfeeling hands.

There is not a peep of opposition to any of this from the ranks of Lisa LaFlamme’s morally outraged professional colleagues within the official media, who are only really ever thinking of their next career move. Any genuine, politically principled opposition, if voiced even in a whisper, would truly end one’s career in the current stultifying political environment. Now that really is a scandal.



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