

# Corporate media bosses bow to Trump demands

Patrick Martin  
16 February 2025

The first month of the Trump administration has seen a full-scale cave-in by the corporate media, in which major newspapers and television and cable networks have bowed to the demands of the fascist president, muzzling or firing journalists viewed as his critics and backing away from any serious defense of freedom of the press.

In Hitler's Germany, this process of bringing the media into line with government dictates was part of what the Nazis called *gleichschaltung*: the systematic coordination of all social institutions with the policies of the ruling party and the will of its *führer*. It was accomplished with considerable violence, as storm troopers attacked and destroyed the offices and presses of the trade unions and the Social Democratic and Communist parties.

In Trump's America, the first stage of the disciplining of the media to the requirements of the new administration has been accomplished without open violence, although the billionaires who control the corporate media have used plenty of economic coercion to suppress criticism of Trump's policies, let alone open dissent.

There has been a series of high-profile departures of media personalities, some of them identified with a critical attitude to Trump, others apparently declining to stay on board as the MAGA flag is run up the mast by their corporate bosses. These include Paul Krugman and Charles Blow at the *New York Times*, Jim Acosta at CNN, and Chuck Todd at NBC/MSNBC.

The departures began even before the election, when several editorial writers quit the *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* after their billionaire owners, Jeff Bezos and Patrick Soon-Shiong, intervened to block planned endorsements of Democratic candidate Kamala Harris over Trump. Hundreds of staff members signed letters of protest over these actions.

Following the election, Disney, the corporate owner of ABC News, settled a lawsuit by Trump over a broadcast in which "This Week" host George Stephanopoulos incorrectly stated that Trump had been found "liable for rape" by a Manhattan civil jury. The actual charge on which the jury found Trump liable was sexual abuse, awarding a civil judgement of \$83 million to former magazine columnist E. Jean Carroll.

Disney agreed to pay \$15 million to an online fund for establishing a Trump presidential library, to pay \$1 million in legal fees to Trump's attorneys in the suit, and to issue a statement apologizing for the mistake. Stephanopoulos declined to read the statement, which was nonetheless issued in his name, and he is reportedly under pressure to leave the network.

A similar, but even more craven, cave-in is in preparation at CBS News, whose corporate owner, Paramount, is considering a settlement in Trump's \$10 billion lawsuit over the editing of a "60 Minutes"

interview with Harris that was broadcast during the election campaign. Trump himself declined to be interviewed by "60 Minutes," fearing questions that might expose his fascist policies.

The editing of the Harris interview was routine, with nearly an hour of questions by journalist Bill Whitaker and responses by Harris cut down to 20 minutes of actual running time on the news program. Trump claimed that meandering answers from Harris had been trimmed and even falsified to make her seem more coherent, but release of the entire transcript showed that these assertions were bogus.

Nonetheless, Paramount boss Shari Redstone, the billionaire heiress of her father Sumner Redstone, is reportedly considering a settlement along the lines of Disney-ABC, with a hefty contribution to the as-yet-nonexistent Trump library. Her concern is said to be the impending \$8 billion merger of Paramount with Skydance Media, owned by David Ellison, son of Oracle billionaire Larry Ellison, the fourth-richest man in the world, with a fortune of \$215 billion, and a fervent Trump backer. The sale would net Redstone \$1.75 billion, according to press reports, but it must be reviewed and approved by the Federal Communications Commission, now under the control of Trump appointee Brendan Carr.

Trump's attorneys chose to file the suit against CBS in an Amarillo, Texas federal district court where there is only one judge, Matthew Kacsmaryk. A Trump appointee and Christian fundamentalist, Kacsmaryk has served as a conduit for dozens of right-wing lawsuits promoting anti-immigrant, anti-abortion and anti-transgender provocations. Seeking to avoid the blanket protection for CBS under the First Amendment, the suit invoked the state of Texas's Deceptive Trade Practices Act, normally used against retail fraud, with the claim that the "60 Minutes" interview caused "billions" of dollars in damage to Trump's election fundraising.

In another legal capitulation, Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, said it had agreed to a \$25 million settlement with Trump of the lawsuit he brought against the company after it blocked his accounts following the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol. Trump instigated the attack using his extensive social media presence, both on Twitter—now controlled by Elon Musk—as well as Facebook. Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg, the second-richest man in America, after Musk, and just ahead of Amazon/*Washington Post* owner Jeff Bezos, visited Trump at Mar-a-Lago in an effort to patch up relations with the would-be dictator, who now wields extensive power over the tech industries.

At CNN, CEO Mark Thompson read the riot act to more than 100 network reporters and on-air staff on Sunday, January 19, the day before Trump's inauguration, telling them not to express "outrage"

during their coverage of Trump's January 20 inauguration, no matter what the scale of Trump's lies and right-wing provocations. He told them to avoid focusing coverage or commentary on Trump's legal difficulties, including both his felony convictions in New York City and his central role in the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol. Those addressed included Jake Tapper, Anderson Cooper and others hauling in multi-million-dollar salaries.

The pro-Trump *New York Post*, owned by ultra-right billionaire Rupert Murdoch, gloated that "CNN's corporate parent, Warner Bros. Discovery, has made it clear it wants the network to adopt a more neutral tone in its dealings with Trump."

CNN followed up the warning with hundreds of layoffs, announced two days after Trump took the oath of office. The network also reorganized its line-up of programs, demoting Jim Acosta from his daytime hour to a midnight to 2 a.m. slot, with a much smaller audience.

Acosta was CNN's White House correspondent during the first Trump administration and his press pass was briefly suspended after a confrontation with Trump during a press conference in which a White House aide tried to seize his microphone. The suspension was reversed by a federal judge after unedited footage of the incident was made public. Acosta was later promoted to principal national news correspondent and weekend anchor, before being given the weekday 10 a.m. slot to host an hour of news reporting.

A Cuban-American who declared that the high point of his career had been challenging Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez at a press conference in Havana, Acosta is hardly a left-wing figure. But he was unable to stomach Trump's systematic falsifications and attacks on democratic rights.

In his final broadcast on CNN, he urged his viewers, "Don't give in to the lies. Don't give in to the fear," clearly referring to the filth spewing out of the second Trump administration and its media enablers, including his own network. He said he would be starting his own program on Substack.

Equally revealing and even more politically important is the ongoing realignment of the editorial pages of the *New York Times*. Liberal columnist Paul Krugman left the newspaper at the end of December, while Charles Blow, another vocal critic of Trump, said goodbye to readers earlier this month.

A lengthy article published last month in the *Columbia Journalism Review* included an interview with Krugman in which he detailed the internal tensions within the newspaper that sets the agenda for the bulk of the American corporate media. He claimed that in the course of 2024, his editors began to intrude into his ability to express himself in his twice-weekly print column and online newsletter.

"I've always been very, very lightly edited on the column," he told the CJR. "And that stopped being the case. The editing became extremely intrusive. It was very much toning down of my voice, toning down of the feel, and a lot of pressure for what I considered false equivalence." There were also efforts "to dictate the subject."

"I approached Mondays and Thursdays with dread," he told the magazine, during which he would be rewriting the rewrites of his column. He said, "I was putting more work—certainly more emotional energy—into repairing the damage from [the] editing than I put into writing the original draft. It's true that nothing was published without my approval; but the back-and-forth, to my eye, both made my life hell and left the columns flat and colorless."

Krugman is a prominent academic economist, winner of the Nobel Prize in 2008, but his political commentary has long been little more

than political propaganda for the Democratic Party, particularly for the Biden-Harris administration. He opposed the Bush administration's war in Iraq, but fervently backed the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, publishing apologetics for the fascist militias which dominate the regime in Kiev. That such a figure has been effectively driven out of the *Times*, and now accuses the newspaper of "sanewashing" the Trump administration—that is, normalizing its unconstitutional and illegal conduct—is a demonstration of the abject prostration of the corporate media before the threat of fascism in America.

The cowering of the corporate media and its billionaire owners has only encouraged the Trump administration to proceed more aggressively. Trump himself has taken to demanding the firing of journalists, such as op-ed columnist Eugene Robinson of the *Washington Post*, and the shutdown of entire programs, such as "60 Minutes," which he said should be "immediately terminated."

The Pentagon, under newly confirmed secretary Pete Hegseth, the fascist former Fox News host, has sought to promote fascist publications at the expense of the "mainstream" corporate media. On January 31, the Pentagon's press office told reporters that NBC News, NPR, Politico and the *New York Times* would give up their permanent office space in the building to be replaced by the *New York Post*, Breitbart News and One America News (all pro-Trump and fascist or ultra-right), as well as *Huffington Post*.

The shift, which took effect February 14, was described as an "Annual Media Rotation Program." It does not deny these media outlets access to the Pentagon, but makes it more difficult to function, and in the case of the television network, amounts to a major obstacle, since CNN, Fox and ABC all have dedicated areas for live broadcasts.

In a further attack on the media, Trump has barred Associated Press reporters from the White House briefing room and from accompanying the president on Air Force One because the AP Style Guide continues to refer to the Gulf of Mexico by that name, rather than embrace Trump's supposed renaming of this body of water—after four centuries!—as the Gulf of America.

While this might appear ludicrous, the renaming is part of a broader program of US expansionism. Trump has threatened to "take back" the Panama Canal, force Denmark to sell Greenland, absorb Canada as the "51st state," and target Mexico, Venezuela and most of Central America for US military intervention by declaring local drug-smuggling gangs to be foreign terrorist entities.



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