

Billionaire Jeff Bezos makes *Washington Post* an ally of Trump

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Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos, who bought the *Washington Post* in 2013, dropped the mask of journalistic independence Wednesday and decreed that the newspaper's editorial pages must be adapted to the agenda of the Trump administration and the interests of the capitalist oligarchy, of which Bezos is a leading representative.

After *Post* opinion editor David Shipley resigned rather than follow this directive, Bezos sent out an email to all the newspaper's employees, also published on X, that could have been drafted for Elon Musk or Donald Trump.

"We are going to be writing every day in support and defense of two pillars: personal liberties and free markets," he wrote. "We'll cover other topics too of course, but viewpoints opposing those pillars will be left to be published by others.

"I am of America and for America, and proud to be so," Bezos continued. "Our country did not get here by being typical. And a big part of America's success has been freedom in the economic realm and everywhere else. Freedom is ethical—it minimizes coercion—and practical; it drives creativity, invention and prosperity."

Bezos's directive takes place as Trump is systematically dismantling what remains of democratic forms of government in the United States. Translated from doublespeak, Bezos's pledge to promote "personal liberties and free markets" means that the *Post* will support Trump's efforts to destroy the political liberties of the American people and unabashedly support the domination of economic life by a group of monopolist oligarchs.

Musk, who is working with Trump to gut social programs and fire hundreds of thousands of federal workers, greeted Bezos's statement with a one-word tweet: "Bravo."

As more than one *Post* staffer has noted publicly, this paean to "freedom" and against "coercion" was part of a message from a billionaire boss imposing his dictates on his employees! And it was combined with the example of Shipley's fate to show what reporters, editors and columnists could expect if they fail to comply.

The 1.5 million Amazon workers worldwide can testify to

how Bezos "minimizes coercion" in the warehouses and on the trucks where he has extracted his estimated \$250 billion-plus fortune through their brutal exploitation. Every second of working time is tracked by management, and workers who fail to "make rate" are shown the door. Workplace injuries and deaths are the inevitable consequence. And Amazon fights tooth and nail against any effort by workers to exercise their "personal liberties" to form unions or demand higher wages and better conditions.

The appalling cynicism and Orwellian doublespeak aside, the banning of even the most tepid criticism of capitalism at the leading newspaper in the US capital has great political significance. It is the culmination of a long process of political and social decay.

It has been more than half a century since the *Post* spearheaded the exposure of the Watergate scandal and the *New York Times* published the Pentagon Papers. Even then, these newspapers were capitalist enterprises, owned by multi-millionaires and committed to the defense of American imperialism abroad and big business at home. Only a year after Richard Nixon resigned as president, in large measure because of the Watergate revelations, *Washington Post* owner Katharine Graham smashed a strike by pressmen, replacing the workers with scabs.

Today, however, there is barely a shred of genuine media criticism, let alone outright opposition, directed against the fascistic course of the Trump administration. The corporate media moguls are following the political trajectory of the ruling class as a whole, as the second Trump administration begins to carry out its program of destroying the democratic rights and social gains of working people and preparing even more barbaric military adventures abroad than those already launched by its Democratic Party predecessors.

The role of Bezos in the process is worth reviewing briefly. After buying the *Post* in 2013 and pledging a hands-off approach to its editorial work, the billionaire permitted a somewhat critical approach to the first Trump administration. The *Post* kept a running tally of the lies Trump told, reaching the staggering figure of 30,000 over

his first four years in the White House. After Trump's failed coup attempt of January 6, 2021, the newspaper supported his impeachment and later his prosecution, and compiled an important video archive of the events of that day.

The *Post's* opposition to Trump, as with the Democratic Party and significant sections of the state apparatus, was centered on issues of foreign policy, particularly the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, of which the *Post* was a leading advocate. But last year, as Trump cemented the Republican presidential nomination and moved ahead in the polls, there was a pronounced shift. Bezos brought in a new publisher, Will Lewis, a veteran of the Rupert Murdoch right-wing media empire in Britain, and a new executive editor to direct news operations, Matt Murray, from the Murdoch-owned *Wall Street Journal*.

Bezos made contact directly with Trump after his near-assassination in July, offering sympathy and suggesting future support. Only weeks before the election, the billionaire stepped in to bar the *Post* from publishing an endorsement of Vice President Kamala Harris, Trump's Democratic opponent. After Trump won the election, Bezos tweeted his congratulations and wish for "success."

Bezos capped off this realignment by appearing behind Trump at the inauguration five weeks ago and joining a slew of oligarchs in donating \$1 million apiece to the celebration.

In this context it is worth noting that Bezos justified his editorial order by citing the proliferation of diverse opinions on the Internet. Standing alongside Bezos behind Trump were three individuals—Elon Musk (Twitter), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook) and Sundar Pinchai (Google)—who are engaged in a systematic campaign to suppress oppositional sentiment and censor speech online.

There is an element of crude self-interest in the actions of Bezos. He has extensive government contracts that could be negatively affected by the new administration, although he is less dependent on government handouts than Musk. But far more important is the political agreement between two oligarchs, the billionaire dictator of Amazon and the billionaire would-be dictator in the White House.

Bezos's insistence on the principle that he will subordinate the newspaper entirely to the defense of "free markets" expresses the increasing fear on the part of the billionaire oligarchs that an uncontrollable movement from below is developing against the profit system.

Bezos is the most obscene expression of a process of adaptation by the corporate media to the requirements of the Trump administration. Throughout the television networks and daily newspapers, there has been a combined push from the bosses at the top and from the White House to make the media coverage of the new administration as flattering and uncritical as possible.

At MSNBC, the purge of liberal pundits and talk show hosts is already underway. The cable channel is being sold off by parent company NBCUniversal, a subsidiary of Comcast, and this week the new CEO Rebecca Kutler fired longtime evening anchor Joy Reid, while demoting hosts Alex Wagner, Jonathan Capehart, Ayman Mohyeldin and Katie Phang.

The White House is browbeating major journalistic institutions like the Associated Press (AP) and the White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA). The AP has been targeted for refusing to adopt Trump's renaming of the Gulf of Mexico in its Style Guide, with its reporters barred from press briefings and Air Force One travel. The 111-year-old WHCA has lost its authority to select the "daily pool" of reporters covering the president; Trump will now handpick them, favoring ultra-right publications and fascist podcasters.

There is understandable outrage among reporters, editors and other media workers over the drastic shift to the right. Former *Post* executive editor Marty Baron told *The Daily Beast* he was "sad and disgusted" at Bezos's memo to the newspaper's staff. Dozens of *Post* workers have published critical comments on social media, with some threatening to quit if the changed editorial line is brought more directly into the news operations.

But there can be no defense of democratic rights, including the existence of an independent and free press—the so-called Fourth Estate—within a society in which a literal handful of centibillionaires like Musk and Bezos own more wealth than the entire working class combined.

The defense of democratic rights depends on the political mobilization of the working class, based on a socialist program. And that struggle is being spearheaded by the revolutionary socialist press, the *World Socialist Web Site*, which is gaining an increasing audience both in the United States and globally.



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