

Major law firm Paul Weiss capitulates to Trump's fascistic executive order

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One of the two large US law firms targeted by President Donald Trump earlier this month, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP, capitulated last week to the aspiring dictator with a toothless mea culpa pledging to modify its hiring practices and to provide pro bono legal services “that represent the full spectrum of political viewpoints.”

In exchange Trump is rescinding his draconian March 14 executive order that revoked the security clearances of the firm's 1,000 lawyers, barred its employees from federal buildings, and ordered federal agencies to terminate government contracts with the firm's clients.

The climbdown followed a hearing in the case brought by the other targeted law firm, Perkins Coie LLP, which obtained a temporary restraining order from a clearly outraged federal judge in Washington, DC.

Trump responded to that ruling in his typical thuggish manner with a legally specious motion to disqualify the judge, Beryl Howell, from making further decisions in the case, citing a 2023 speech during which she “lamented that America is at a ‘crossroads’ and, in an apparent reference to President Trump, indicated that one path would lead to authoritarianism.”

Paul Weiss's disgusting surrender to the fascistic accusation that it engaged “in the destruction of bedrock American principles,” undercuts Perkins Coie's principled response to the executive order, and mirrors the spinelessness of the Democratic Party with which Paul Weiss has been closely associated for decades.

Years ago Paul Weiss was prominent in the fight for civil rights. The first major New York law partnership to combine Jews with non-Jews and to hire black associates, its lawyers, notably Bill Coleman and Louis Pollak, worked closely with Thurgood Marshall and the

NAACP Legal Defense Fund to challenge segregated public education, leading to the landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* overturning the racist doctrine of “separate but equal” more than 70 years ago.

That was a different era, when elements in the ruling class were willing to give some support to social equality, at least so long as bourgeois property relations remained intact. This time around, however, rather than join Perkins Coie at the judicial barricades, Paul Weiss retained Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP, one of the few large firms that represented Trump's business interests during years passed. The result was a private meeting last Wednesday between Paul Weiss managing partner Brad Karp and Trump himself. Each released different versions of their supposed agreement on Thursday.

Both agreements begin with the platitude that “American justice ... must be fair and nonpartisan for all, including by representing clients across the political spectrum.” Paul Weiss's version recites that the firm is committed to “merits-based hiring, promotion and retention,” while Trump added the race-baiting qualifier “instead of ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion’ policies.”

Paul Weiss will contribute “\$40 million in pro bono legal services” during Trump's term “to support causes including assisting our Nation's veterans, fairness in the justice system, and combating anti-Semitism.” While the sum might appear substantial to working families struggling to keep their heads above water, Paul Weiss uses its astronomical rates, as high as \$3,000 per hour, along with aggressive billing practices to attribute \$200 million every year to its volunteer “pro bono” legal work. For a firm with \$2.5 billion in annual revenues, \$10 million per year is meaningless.

Trump's version of the agreement states, "Paul Weiss has acknowledged the wrongdoing of its former partner Mark Pomerantz," but no such stab in the back appears in the firm's agreement, internal email or public announcement. Pomerantz incurred Trump's wrath by resigning from the Manhattan District Attorney's Office and denouncing Alvin Bragg's decision not to file criminal fraud charges against Trump, while comparing Trump to Mafia boss John Gotti, whom Pomerantz prosecuted successfully. Bragg subsequently brought more narrowly drawn fraud charges against Trump, based on his attempts to cover up a payoff to porn star Stormy Daniels, winning a conviction on 34 criminal counts of filing false documents.

Thursday, Pomerantz issued a statement, "I engaged in no wrongdoing by working as a prosecutor to uphold the rule of law."

Trump gloated to the press in the Oval Office Friday. Numerous "global" firms "did bad things," Trump said, but they now "want to make deals," adding, "They're not babies, they're very sophisticated people."

According to Trump's fascistic adviser, Steve Bannon, however, major law firm partners are no longer "going to be walking around making four and five, six million bucks a year, because the administration is going to put those law firms out of business," emphasizing, "There are major law firms in Washington, D.C., and what we are trying to do is put you out of business and bankrupt you."

Paul Weiss's submission to Trump's fascistic attack on the legal profession has triggered widespread condemnation. "Paul Weiss used to be a law firm to be admired and respected. No more," said Norman Ornstein, a senior fellow emeritus at the conservative think tank American Enterprise Institute, calling the agreement "a stain on the legal profession."

George Conway, formerly a big-firm lawyer married to erstwhile Trump press spokesperson Kellyanne Conway, said, "This Paul Weiss capitulation is the most disgraceful action by a major law firm in my lifetime, so appalling that I couldn't believe it at first. Any lawyers at that firm—partners or associates—who don't promptly resign will defile their moral and professional reputations beyond repair."

Trump's recent attack on the legal profession did not

come out of the blue. Three weeks ago, well before the executive orders targeting Perkins Coie and Paul Weiss, American Bar Association president William R. Bay denounced "efforts to undermine the courts and the legal profession."

"Clients have the right to have access to their lawyer without interference by the government. Lawyers must be free to represent clients and perform their ethical duty without fear of retribution. These government actions deny clients access to justice and betray our fundamental values," Bay's statement read.

While Bay pledged, "we will not stay silent in the face of efforts to remake the legal profession into something that rewards those who agree with the government and punishes those who do not," none of the other major US law firms with more than 1,000 lawyers has spoken up against the executive orders against Perkins Coie or Paul Weiss.

As of this writing, close to 1,400 associates from firms with more than 1,000 lawyers have signed an open letter denouncing their employers' cowardly silence. "Over the past several weeks, the Executive Branch has launched an all-out attack aimed at dismantling rule-of-law norms, including by censuring individual law firms by name because of past representation," according to the letter.

The associates "call on our employers, large American law firms, to defend their colleagues and the legal profession by condemning this rapid purge of 'partisan actors,' a group that seems to be synonymous with those the President feels have wronged him."



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