

# Trump's American-style *Gleichschaltung* proceeds: The closing down of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting

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On Friday, officials at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) announced the organization would begin winding down operations. The majority of the corporation's approximately 100 staff positions will disappear when financing runs out in September. A small transition team will be maintained through January 2026 to ensure "a responsible and orderly closeout of operations," the CPB explained in a statement.

The action is the product of the vote by Congress in July to approve a request to rescind already approved spending. In the case of the CPB, the House and Senate, with Donald Trump signing the legislation July 24, took back all of its funding, approximately \$1.1 billion (to be spent over two years).

The long-term impact on National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) will be dramatic. The funding for NPR and PBS comes from a number of sources, as they have never been properly funded by the federal government.

NPR only receives a small amount, some 1 percent, of its funding directly from the federal government. PBS receives approximately 15 percent of its money from the government.

The majority of the CPB's appropriation goes to local public television and radio stations through grants. These local stations choose to become members of PBS or NPR and pay dues and fees to the national organizations for programming and other services.

Stations in rural areas and smaller towns, many of which are dependent on the CPB for funds, will struggle to survive. PBS CEO and President Paula Kerger commented in July that "Many of our stations which provide access to free unique local programming and emergency alerts will now be forced to make hard decisions in the weeks and months ahead." Larger stations in major urban centers have increasingly turned to other funding sources, including viewer and corporate donations.

The *New York Times* reported in July on a decade-old internal NPR report indicating that if Congress cut off spending to the public radio system

up to 18 percent of the roughly 1,000 member stations would close, with broadcasters in the Midwest, South and the West affected the most. Nationwide, up to 30 percent of listeners would lose access to NPR programming.

"Despite the extraordinary efforts of millions of Americans who called, wrote, and petitioned Congress to preserve federal funding for CPB, we now face the difficult reality of closing our operations," said CPB President and CEO Patricia Harrison in a statement issued August 1. "CPB remains committed to fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities and supporting our partners through this transition with transparency and care."

A recent Harris Poll found that 66 percent of Americans supported federal funding for public radio, with the same share calling it a good value. Support included 58 percent of Republicans and 77 percent of Democrats.

Far-right Republican politicians celebrated the demise of the CPB, using their favorite argument, that it had funded "partisan propaganda" and "left-wing opinion journalism" for decades. Senator John Kennedy of Louisiana gloated, "The Corporation for Public Broadcasting—the scheme bureaucrats used to funnel taxpayer money to NPR and PBS—will soon be no more."

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, also of Louisiana, chimed in: "\$1.1B returned to taxpayers. No more public dollars for partisan propaganda. Republicans are ending wasteful spending and putting America First."

On social media, Trump crowed last month that "REPUBLICANS HAVE TRIED DOING THIS FOR 40 YEARS, AND FAILED....BUT NO MORE."

There is an element of fascist delusion in the claims about "left-wing" partisanship. As we noted last month:

Under attacks from figures like Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina, the cultural establishment [including NPR and PBS] took a knife to its vital parts years ago and did its best to remove or neutralize them. Every

reasonable effort has been made to fund the anodyne, innocuous and non-threatening in television, radio and cultural programming generally.

For its timidity and pro-establishment programming, NPR deservedly earned the nickname it obtained in certain quarters of “National Patriotic Radio.”

Nonetheless, the extremely sinister intent and thrust of the action by the Trump administration and Congress should be patently clear. The ultimate aim is to silence every voice that doesn’t accord with the ultra-right, chauvinist, anti-immigrant, militaristic filth pouring from the White House, and every source that fails to endorse the latter’s drive to establish a presidential dictatorship. In such circumstances, even ineffectual appeals for “tolerance” and “diversity,” along with the occasional exposé of corporate or governmental malfeasance, for which the public broadcasters are known, become intolerable varieties of “lunatic Marxism.”

This latest attack is part of a generalized political-cultural counter-revolution, a sharp acceleration of a process under way for decades. With the new administration, it has taken a dramatic shift in the direction of a US adaptation of the Hitlerite *Gleichschaltung*. The term, variously translated as “synchronization,” “coordination” or “integration,” refers to the Nazi regime’s effort to “bring into line” all aspects of political and cultural life and subordinate them to the fascist state’s ideology.

With Trump and his ultra-right accomplices, efforts to enforce this sort of “integration” have included the sustained assault on the independence of universities from the state, the purging of scholars and the attack on the right to protest the Gaza genocide; the Gestapo-like ICE raids and the accompanying slander of immigrants as “drug dealers, criminals, rapists;” the pressure applied to media corporations to discharge “dissident” reporters, as well as quasi-iconoclasts such as Stephen Colbert.

*Gleichschaltung*, as historian Thomas Childers explains, is “derived from electrical usage, meaning all switches were put onto the same circuit so that all could be activated by throwing a single master switch.” (*The Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*) The Holocaust Encyclopedia comments that the term “refers to the Nazi regime’s systematic process of consolidating control over all aspects of German society, politics, and culture following Hitler’s rise to power. This policy aimed to eliminate dissent and ensure that every institution conformed to Nazi ideology.”

“Shortly after Hitler became chancellor,” points out the Wiener Holocaust Library, “all opposition newspapers were banned. Those that remained were subject to strict censorship laws, so open opposition to the regime became increasingly difficult. On the 4 October 1933 the Editorship Law, the *Schriftleitergesetz*, was passed. This law stated that all

editors must be ‘Aryan,’ dismissing hundreds of non-‘Aryan’ editors on purely racial grounds.”

In his essay, “Stages of Totalitarian ‘Integration’ (*Gleichschaltung*): The Consolidation of National Socialist Rule in 1933 and 1934,” Karl Dietrich Bracher asserts that

The first two years of National Socialist rule offer an instructive example of the political methods, the internal and external mechanisms employed in the totalitarian “integration” of economically, socially, and politically advanced society, and illustrate the stages in this integration process.

Bracher goes on:

Already in his Reichstag address of March 23 [1933] Hitler had explicitly demanded a unified organization of cultural and national life. First the economic organizations of industry, handicraft, agriculture, and of the working class had been integrated and then, with the appointment of the Propaganda Minister, the large organs of public opinion; now, with the extension of the state-controlled Chambers of Culture (*Kulturkammern*) the party reached out its arm to those writers who had not been affected by the first book burnings and deprivations of German citizenship.

Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt neatly summarized the goal of *Gleichschaltung* as national unity and purity, achieved through the “extermination of heterogeneity.”

This process is dangerously underway in the US, unopposed in any meaningful fashion by the Democratic Party, the *New York Times* or the liberal and “left” establishment. None of these forces has the slightest interest or concern in democratic principles or rights. It falls to the socialist movement and the working class to expose and defeat the threat of dictatorship and fascism.



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