

Fired “60 Minutes” journalist reveals pro-Trump censorship at CBS News

Patrick Martin
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The firing of “60 Minutes” journalist Scott Pelley by CBS News is the most brazen demonstration of the transformation of the corporate media into nothing more than a propaganda agency for the fascist cabal in the White House.

The firing of Pelley is the latest act in the reorganization of CBS following its takeover in August by David Ellison, the son of centi-billionaire Larry Ellison, founder of Oracle, one of the largest database and enterprise software providers. Larry Ellison is a fervent backer of Donald Trump and the Republican Party.

The younger Ellison brought in right-wing Zionist Bari Weiss, a former editorial writer who left the *New York Times*, objecting to its occasional (very muted) criticism of Israel, as editor-in-chief of CBS News. Weiss had no experience in television journalism, but she has swiftly directed the purging of the news staff, particularly at “60 Minutes,” the highest-rated news program on broadcast television.

Pelley was fired after a staff meeting with the new head of “60 Minutes,” Nick Bilton, who was installed by Weiss after she fired executive producer Tanya Simon and correspondents Sharyn Alfonsi and Cecilia Vega. Alfonsi was the correspondent on the “60 Minutes” segment exposing the CECOT torture prison in El Salvador where the Trump administration has been illegally deporting immigrants from Venezuela. Weiss initially blocked the broadcast of that segment in December, then permitted it to air in January with a much smaller audience.

Angered by the firings—as well as the resignation of correspondent Anderson Cooper—Pelley declared that Weiss was “murdering” the long-established CBS program, which once featured journalists like Mike Wallace, Harry Reasoner, Ed Bradley, Dan Rather and Morley Safer. He criticized both Bilton and Weiss as incompetent and inexperienced. In a letter issued after his firing, Pelley wrote that the “new management has instructed me to inject falsehoods and bias into a politically sensitive story.”

Pelley is no opponent of the political establishment. This is underscored by his own account of the disputed story. The

“politically sensitive story” at the center of his firing was a February “60 Minutes” segment on the pro-immigrant protests in Minneapolis that erupted after immigration agents murdered Renée Good and Alex Pretti, protests that gave rise to mass demonstrations and calls for a general strike. The segment was to be “balanced,” portraying the demonstrators who were being murdered as violent. Pelley acknowledged that

I instructed my producers to find images in which we see the protesters acting aggressively. ... We also included a picture of Alex Pretti before he was killed kicking out a taillight on a police car and made a point of saying, this is Alex Pretti and this is what he did.

But even these pseudo-impartial efforts to provide some degree of justification for the ICE murders did not go far enough for Weiss. She wanted Pelley to fabricate a false narrative.

Pelley continued:

Bari Weiss sends an email to my boss, Tanya Simon. Two of the things in the email include, can we make the protesters look more violent? Now, I’m paraphrasing. I don’t have the quote, but that’s what was communicated to me. And the other thing, Renée Good’s car. You need to describe her as driving toward the officer.

Pelley noted in the interview that this demand was in contradiction to what the video itself clearly showed, that “Ms. Good’s wheels turned completely as far as they will go, away from the officer.”

The effect of these changes would be to align the “60

Minutes” broadcast with the statements issued by President Trump and other top aides, who branded Good and Pretti as “terrorists” and claimed they had attacked the federal agents. Pelley’s refusal to make the changes precipitated his firing.

Pelley’s revelation of the pro-Trump manipulation of the news is all the more convincing because he is a thoroughly establishment figure, with 37 years at CBS News. In fact, both Pelley and his *Times* interviewer, Lulu Garcia-Navarro, sought to downplay the role of the billionaire oligarchs, Trump and the two Ellisons, in the CBS purge. There was no suggestion that Trump put any direct pressure on the network to purge “60 Minutes,” and there was no mention of Larry Ellison at all.

But only three days after Pelley’s firing, Trump stormed out of an interview with Kristen Welker, moderator of NBC’s “Meet the Press,” denouncing her suggestion that he had no evidence to back up his claims of voter fraud, either in 2020 or today. His interview included the following exchange:

TRUMP: Our elections are crooked and you’re crooked, and “Meet the Press” is crooked.

WELKER: But Mr. President—

TRUMP: And so is ABC and CBS and CNN.

Pelley and “60 Minutes,” like “Meet the Press,” are not paragons of independent journalism. They have functioned for decades as fixtures of the ruling class and its political establishment. They have played a significant role in as much as one of the functions of the bourgeois media is to transmit information that the ruling class needs, and it provides one of the mechanisms through which conflicts within the ruling class itself are fought out and mediated.

Within these limits, “60 Minutes” has at times taken up stories that exposed government wrongdoing—the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, and more recently the CECOT torture prison—reporting that also is intended to lend the corporate media as a whole a certain credibility.

The level of criminality has reached such a point that even this framework of media “independence” has become intolerable.

The first two years of Trump’s second term have seen a frontal assault on the corporate media by the fascist president. ABC and CBS caved in and paid \$16 million apiece to settle billion-dollar lawsuits by Trump over allegedly unfair broadcasts. Trump filed similar suits against the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and BBC News in Britain, all of which remain active. He also denied press passes to the Associated Press after it continued to refer to

the Gulf of Mexico under its historical name, after he ordered it renamed “Gulf of America.”

A parallel process has taken place at the universities, including institutions like Harvard, which the Trump regime has sought to discipline under a modern-day version of the Nazi principle of *Gleichschaltung*, the aggressive forcing of educational and cultural institutions into strict alignment with state and corporate ideology.

Virtually the whole of the American media now lies in the hands of a few billionaire-controlled monopolies—Ellison’s Paramount, which has swallowed CBS, CNN and Warner Bros.; Murdoch’s Fox and Wall Street Journal; Comcast’s NBC; Disney’s ABC; and the *Washington Post*, undergoing its own right-wing makeover at the hands of its owner, the centi-billionaire Jeff Bezos. As for the “liberal,” Democratic Party-aligned media, its flagship, the *New York Times*, exists primarily as a conduit for the military and intelligence agencies.

Under these conditions, the role of the *World Socialist Web Site* is indispensable. The WSWS is the organ of the international working class—politically and financially independent of the corporations and the state, beholden to no oligarch.

David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, published a statement yesterday calling on all readers to donate to the WSWS. The crisis of capitalism, North noted, is a daily reality experienced by the American and international working class, “And the only honest and politically realistic answer is: Build a mass socialist movement of the working class to put an end to the capitalist system.”

While the corporate media becomes ever more openly the propaganda outlet of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, the WSWS “is the indispensable online publication—to which working people and youth across the world now turn, each and every day, for an accurate presentation and scientific analysis of world events. But the WSWS does not merely comment upon events. It is a weapon of the class struggle.”

We call on all readers to donate to the WSWS today and help build a socialist movement of the working class, in the US and throughout the world.



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