

With Bezos at the Helm, Democracy Dies at the Washington Post Editorial Board

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In the Soviet Union, everybody was aware that the media was controlled by the state. But in a corporate state like the U.S., a veneer of independence is still maintained, although trust in the media has been plummeting for years.

*The Washington Post’s glaring conflicts of interest have of late once again been the subject of scrutiny online, thanks to a [new article](#) denouncing a supposed attempt to “soak” billionaires in taxes. Written by star columnist Megan McArdle — who previously argued that Walmart’s wages are [too high](#), that there is [nothing wrong](#) with Google’s monopoly, and that the [Grenfell Fire](#) was a [price worth paying](#) for cheaper buildings — the article claimed that Americans have such class envy that the government would “destroy [billionaires’] fortunes so that the rest of us don’t have to look at them.” Notably, the *Post* chose to illustrate it with a picture of its owner, Jeff Bezos, making it seem as if it was directly defending his power and wealth, something they have been [accused of on more than one occasion](#).*

There was considerable speculation online as to whether Bezos himself wrote the piece, so blatantly in his interest it was. Unfortunately, this sort of speculation has raged ever since the Amazon CEO bought the newspaper in 2013 for \$250 million.

Did a billionaire publish th- oh wait pic.twitter.com/0FZIRLBSrc

— P Nielsen Hayden (@pnh) [June 10, 2021](#)

Undue influence

Being owned by the world’s richest individual does not mean that *The Washington Post* and its employees are rolling in dough themselves. Far from it: Bezos’ revolution at the newspaper, which has led to both increased pageviews and company value, has been largely based on simply squeezing workers harder than before. In an [interview](#) with the *Columbia Journalism Review*, management acknowledged that *Post* reporters are pushed to produce almost four times as many stories as their peers at *The New York Times*.

Furthermore, the *Post* writes and rewrites the same story but from slightly different angles and with different headlines in order to generate more clicks, and thus more revenue. Thanks to new technology, reporters' every keystroke is monitored and they are under constant pressure from management not to fall behind. The technique of constant surveillance is not unlike what hyper-exploited Amazon warehouse workers who wear GPS devices or Fitbit watches have to endure.

Bezos is currently worth a shade under \$200 billion, with his wealth nearly [doubling](#) since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. With such a fortune to protect, the obvious solution is to acquire media outlets to control the narrative in the face of rising public disenchantment with rampaging inequality. Omar Ocampo, a researcher for the Program on Inequality and the Common Good at the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), said that this is a common tactic among the super wealthy. "Billionaire ownership of major news outlets is but another tool the billionaire class deploys for the purpose of wealth defense. It gives them the power to set the terms of the agenda and influence public opinion in their favor," Ocampo told *MintPress*.

But Bezos is far from the only senior figure with questionable connections. The company's CEO, Frederick Ryan, was a senior member of the Reagan White House, rising to become the 40th president's assistant and later the chairman of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation. He later became CEO of *Politico*. In the *Post's* [announcement](#) of the hiring move, they themselves noted that among Ryan's biggest achievements at their rival outlet was "helping the news organization win a lucrative advertising deal with Goldman Sachs and host presidential debates before the 2008 and 2012 Republican primaries."

Another [neoconservative](#) in a key position is Editorial Page Editor Fred Hiatt. Under Hiatt's tenure, anti-establishment columnists like Dan Froomkin were [let go](#) and warmongers like the late Charles Krauthammer, Paul Wolfowitz, and David Ignatius moved in. "After being so wrong on such a huge story as the invasion of Iraq, hawkish ideologue Fred Hiatt should have been terminated as editorial page editor," [Jeff Cohen](#), former Professor of Journalism at Ithaca College and founder of media watchdog group [Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting](#), told *MintPress*, adding:

In a decent media system, someone who has been so inaccurate on so many issues as Hiatt would not be in a powerful media position two decades later. Powerful voices in U.S. media often argue that society should be a 'meritocracy' — with advancement based on ability or achievement. Hiatt proves that the U.S. corporate media system is just the opposite — a 'kakistocracy' — where the unqualified and unprincipled rise to the top."

Other highly questionable hires include Jerusalem correspondent Ruth Eglash, who spent seven years putting out content that was often indistinguishable from Israeli government propaganda. At the time of her hire, activists [highlighted](#) the conflicts of interest she had, given her husband's job as a PR rep for the country. In November 2020, Eglash quit the *Post* to become chief of communications for the Israeli ambassador to the United States and United Nations. "My experiences as a journalist have afforded me a great instinct of how to better tell Israel's unique story," she [said](#), adding "a strong U.S.-Israel relationship and showcasing Israel's successes to the world has [sic] always been a passion of mine."

At the center of the news cosmos

The Washington Post is among the most powerful, influential, and widely-read media outlets in the United States. Its position as the dominant newspaper in the nation's capital reinforces its place as a thought-leading, agenda-setting publication. Whatever appears in the *Post* will likely be in the rest of the nation's media, so authoritative is its reputation.

There are no more important pages than its editorial section, where its board comes together to lay out the collective wisdom of its most senior journalists and editors. Through its editorial page, the senior staff lay out the newspaper's line to others and broadcast what they see as the correct position on the most pressing issues of the day. Hence, editorials are essentially instructions to their well-heeled and influential readers in D.C. and around the country on what to think about any given subject.

This is particularly troublesome as, despite the fact the newspaper presents itself as a defender of liberty and a champion of the people (its tagline is "Democracy Dies in Darkness"), the editorial board has represented the interests of the powerful over ordinary Americans on issue after issue. The following editorials are examples of this in action.

Could we be any more pro-war?

The *Post's* editorial board has generally been extremely supportive of whatever conflicts the U.S. has started, and has consistently warned against ending the violence. In a 2015 [editorial](#) entitled "Drone strikes are bad; no drone strikes would be worse," it balked at the idea of stopping the highly controversial bombing campaigns throughout the Middle East and North Africa. By that time, President Barack Obama was [bombing](#) seven countries simultaneously. Nevertheless, the *Post* argued that drones had successfully defeated Al-Qaeda and that the use of drone strikes "shouldn't be up for review."

In recent times, the rising newspaper of record has also been a driver of increased hostilities with China, [describing](#) Beijing's military's moves in the South China Sea as "provocations" against the U.S., [spreading rumors](#) about the COVID-19 virus's origin, and [demanding](#) American companies like Apple "resist China's tyranny" and begin to relocate their production facilities elsewhere to punish the Chinese government.

On Latin America too, the editorial board has proven to be extremely hawkish. It immediately [endorsed](#) a U.S.-backed far-right [coup](#) in Bolivia in 2019, insisting that "there could be little doubt who was ultimately responsible for the chaos: newly resigned President Evo Morales." The *Post* condemned him for refusing to "cooperate" with "Bolivia's more responsible leaders," who were organizing his overthrow, and chastised him for using the word "coup" for what was going on. Morales, they concluded, was a victim of his own "insatiable appetite for power" and his inability to "accept that a majority of Bolivians wanted him to leave office."

In 2002, the paper also [supported](#) a coup against Hugo Chavez, falsely claiming the Venezuelan president had ordered the shooting of thousands of demonstrators and [absurdly](#) asserting that "there's been no suggestion that the United States had anything to do with [it]."



The Post's View

Drone strikes are bad; no drone strikes would be worse



A unmanned U.S. drone flies over southern Afghanistan in 2010. (Kirsty Wigglesworth/ASSOCIATED PRESS)

By **Editorial Board**

May 1, 2015

The WaPo editorial board's less than subtle take on drone warfare

In more recent times, it has demanded more action to unseat Chavez's successor, Nicolas Maduro, including [supporting](#) U.S. sanctions that have now [killed](#) over 100,000 people, according to a United Nations rapporteur. The *Post's* [justification](#) in 2017 was that Maduro was on the verge of carrying out his own "coup," "abolish[ing] the opposition-controlled legislature, cancel[ing] future elections and establish[ing] a regime resembling that of Cuba's" — none of which has happened. In its efforts to oust the democratically-elected leader, the *Post* even [aligned](#) itself with Donald Trump and [endorsed](#) far-right [coup leader](#) Juan Guaidó as "Venezuela's legitimate president," a position some [polls](#) have suggested as little as 3% of Venezuelans hold.

The editorial board has expressed its desire to see regime change in leftist-controlled

Nicaragua, too. President Daniel Ortega, it [claims](#), is “taking a sledgehammer” to opposition against him, while it also demands that the U.S., which has done nothing but offer “mild verbal opposition” to his rule, do more. What happened to the U.S. of the 1980s, “which spent so much money and political capital to promote democracy in Nicaragua?” they [ask](#) sadly.

In reality, of course, the U.S. is currently trying to strangle Nicaragua’s economy through sanctions. And in the 1980s, Washington’s “democracy promotion” agenda included the funding, training and arming of fascist death squads who [wrought havoc](#) across Central America, killing hundreds of thousands in [genocides](#) from which the area may never recover. The architects of the violence were [found guilty](#) in U.S. courts, while the Reagan administration was tried and [convicted](#) by the International Court of Justice on 15 counts that amount to international terrorism. That the *Post*’s editorial board remembers that history as “promoting democracy” is particularly worrisome.

Fake news, fake newspapers

The Washington Post was the [key supporter](#) of fake news detection system “PropOrNot,” which was [almost immediately exposed](#) as a [fake](#) operation itself, forcing the newspaper to [publicly distance](#) itself from its own reporting. Yet it was the *Post* itself that perpetuated the most notorious and damaging fake news story of the 21st century: the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction hoax and Saddam Hussein’s fictional links to al-Qaeda.

In a highly influential [editorial](#) entitled “Irrefutable” the *Post* wrote that, after watching Secretary of State Colin Powell’s speech at the United Nations, “it is hard to imagine how anyone could doubt that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction... And [Powell] offered a powerful new case that Saddam Hussein’s regime is cooperating with a branch of the al-Qaeda organization that is trying to acquire chemical weapons and stage attacks in Europe.”

“No page was more crucial in propelling the disastrous U.S. invasion of Iraq than the *Post*’s editorial page — which beat the drums for war in a couple dozen editorials in the six months leading up to the invasion,” Cohen told *MintPress*, adding:

The *Post*’s op-ed page was almost as cartoonishly wrong on Iraq, offering little dissent or corrective to the editorial page’s jingoism — especially in that pivotal media moment following Colin Powell’s error-filled U.N. speech. While the editorial page offered up its ‘Irrefutable’ verdict, the op-ed page’s liberal voice offered an embarrassing column, headlined [‘I’m Persuaded’](#).”

The *Post* played a major role in manufacturing consent for the deadliest war since Vietnam, [publishing](#) 27 editorials in support of an invasion. As with PropOrNot, it backtracked long after the dust had settled, [apologizing](#) for its role in amping the public up to accept that war. Yet to this day it continues to push for others.

Surveillance state champion

Despite telling its readers that “Democracy Dies in Darkness,” *The Washington Post* certainly has a negative opinion about those individuals who work to shine a light on illegal government activities. In 2016, its editorial board [demanded](#) “no pardon for Edward Snowden,” condemning his backers like filmmaker Oliver Stone and expressing outrage that Snowden had revealed that the U.S. was spying on Russia and carrying out cyberattacks

against China. In its long denunciation, it insisted that the NSA's massive surveillance operation against the American public resulted in "no specific harm, actual or attempted." As such, the editorial board made history by [becoming](#) the first newspaper ever to call for the imprisonment of its own source, on whose back and information it won a Pulitzer Prize.

If Snowden was not worthy of defending, then it is no surprise that the *Post's* editorial team expressed their delight when Julian Assange was dragged out of the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, [declaring](#) it a "victory for the rule of law." "Julian Assange is not a free-press hero. And he is long overdue for personal accountability," they wrote, spreading baseless conspiracy theories that the Australian publisher worked with Russia to hack American democracy.

The Washington Post

The Post's View

No pardon for Edward Snowden



Former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden speaks via video link during the Athens Democracy Forum at the National Library in Athens, Greece, on Sept. 16. (Pantelis Saitas/European Pressphoto Agency)

By Editorial Board September 17 at 5:59 PM

EDWARD SNOWDEN, the former National Security Agency contractor who blew the cover off the federal government's [electronic surveillance](#) programs three years ago, has his admirers. After the inevitably

After relying on him as a source, the Post went after Snowden and any who dared to back him

The Ecuadorian government of Rafael Correa, which offered asylum to the Western dissidents, also came under fire. In 2013, the *Post* (falsely) [labeled](#) Correa an "autocrat" and "the hemisphere's preeminent anti-U.S. demagogue." They also directly threatened him, writing that, "If Mr. Correa welcomes Mr. Snowden, there will be an easy way to demonstrate that Yanqui-baiting has its price."

Of course, the *Post* is now intimately linked with the national security state after Amazon signed a number of deals to provide intelligence and computing services to several three-

letter agencies. In 2020, the Bezos-owned Amazon Web Services [signed](#) a new deal with the CIA worth tens of billions of dollars.

The editorial board has also gone up to bat for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) multiple times, [insisting](#) that it is “the wrong target for outrage,” presenting the agency as key in the battle against art theft and nuclear proliferation. “Abolishing ICE is not a serious policy proposal,” the board [wrote](#) in 2018, despite the fact that the U.S. survived without the agency perfectly well until its creation in 2003.

Attacking any pro-people policy

The Washington Post has aggressively attempted to beat back any new political movements challenging the establishment. Chief among them has been the one around Bernie Sanders, for whom the newspaper has reserved a special ire. In 2016, it famously [ran](#) 16 negative stories on Sanders in the space of 16 hours and has used its fact-checking page to [relentlessly undermine](#) him, sometimes to bizarre effect.

“Bernie Sanders keeps saying his average donation is \$27, but his own numbers contradict that,” read the [headline](#) of one article, which detailed how his average donation was actually \$27.89, not \$27. It also gave his statement that six men (one of whom is Bezos) hold as much wealth as the bottom half of the world’s population “three Pinocchios” — the designation just below the most egregious lie. This was because, they argued, billionaires’ wealth is tied up in stocks, not money itself, and most people own essentially nothing. Why this disproved his assertion they did not explain. Going undisclosed is that both Bezos and the *Post*’s chief fact-checker Glen Kessler, who is the [scion](#) of a fossil fuel baron, would stand to lose a fortune if Sanders were elected.

Likewise, the *Post*’s editorial board did all it could to ensure Sanders was not elected in 2016, publishing editorials such as “[Bernie Sanders’s fiction-filled campaign](#),” which defended big banks from Sanders’s attacks; “[Mr. Sanders’s shocking ignorance on his core issue](#),” which presented Hillary Clinton as a more credible Wall Street reformer; and “[Mr. Sanders peddles fiction on free trade](#),” which championed the long-discredited North American Free Trade Agreement as a jobs creator. Unsurprisingly, the editorial board was also a [vociferous supporter](#) of the Trans Pacific Partnership.

In 2020, the *Post* was no less hostile to Sanders, publishing an [editorial](#) headlined “We should pay more attention to the Democrats who pay attention to reality,” which stated that “Mr. Sanders promises unlimited free stuff to everyone; other candidates propose smarter, more targeted approaches.”

The *Post*’s higher-ups have been careful to oppose virtually every piece of progressive or pro-people policy proposals. Chief among them has been healthcare. The United States is alone in the developed world in not offering some kind of universal healthcare to its population. Its privatized system is [multiple times](#) more expensive than that of comparable countries and has the [worst outcomes](#) in the West. Yet the board has consistently scare-mongered its readers, [claiming](#) “Single-payer health care would have an astonishingly high price tag,” and attacking Medicare-For-All proponents running for office. “Why go to the trouble of running for president to promote ideas that can’t work?” it [asked](#) rhetorically, before going on to insist that moving towards a healthcare system like that of Canada, Japan or Western Europe does not meet a “baseline degree of factual plausibility.”

On education, it has been just as regressive. “There are consequences to making college free,” it [warned](#) readers. Chief among these would be that private universities would make less money, which, apparently should be a major concern. “Forgiving student loans the wrong way will only worsen inequality,” ran the headline of another [editorial](#), in which the board pretended to be ultra-left elite-hating radicals, arguing that we should not make college free because Ivy League graduates would benefit the most (around one-third of the *Post*’s editorial team attended an Ivy League school). It also feigned a far-left position on charter schools, [pretending](#) that essentially privatizing schools and handing them over to businesses to run would solve racial inequality in America, and that anyone who opposed them (like teachers’ unions) was no progressive.

Perhaps the most blatant conflict of interest the *Post* has displayed is in their committed opposition to a wealth tax. “Elizabeth Warren wants a ‘wealth tax.’ It might backfire,” they [wrote](#), making a series of bizarre and illogical arguments against the plan, such as immigrants will stop wanting to come to the U.S. if such a tax is imposed (the threshold for paying a wealth tax is \$50 million). Five months later, the board reaffirmed their position: “A wealth tax isn’t the best way to tax the rich,” they [wrote](#), claiming that rich people “can afford the best accountants and lawyers,” and so taxing them is presumably impossible.

Of course, the *Post*’s owner, Jeff Bezos, has every reason to go all out to prevent a wealth tax gaining traction. A *CNBC* [study](#) calculated that Bezos would be forced to pay \$5.7 billion annually if Warren’s tax plans came to fruition.

The *Post* has also taken a firm stand against serious regulation of monopolies, [decrying](#) a supposed “antitrust onslaught” against Google, spearheaded by simplistic “break-them-up” rhetoric from dishonest actors. In 2016, it also [lambasted](#) Sanders for his “oversimplified,” “crowd-pleasing” demagoguery on Wall Street regulation, insisting that there has actually been widespread reform of the financial sector since 2008, making another crash unlikely.

Unsurprisingly for an outlet owned by a [poverty-wage employer](#), the *Post* has also [consistently opposed](#) a national \$15 minimum wage. In March, it [categorically stated](#) that “[a] \$15 minimum wage won’t happen” and Democrats should stop trying to make it happen. Instead, they advised, they should “practice the art of the possible.” This, the board explained, meant falling in line behind Arkansas arch-Republican Senator Tom Cotton to support his proposals for a creeping state-by-state rise to \$10.

On the climate, too, the *Post* has pushed extremely regressive positions, [opposing](#) a Green New Deal outright and suggesting the atmosphere be turned into a giant free market where polluters can trade credits and speculate. “The left’s opposition to a carbon tax shows there’s something deeply wrong with the left,” they [wrote](#). They also [endorsed](#) the highly controversial process of fracking. Seeing as the *Post*’s editorial board is littered with former employees of the notorious [climate-change denying](#) *Wall Street Journal*, its stance is perhaps not surprising.

On COVID, the *Post* has [consistently opposed](#) teachers’ unions calls to keep schools closed, as well as standing against \$2,000 checks. A universal payout is a “bad idea” they [stated](#), but one “whose time has come because of politics, not economics.” So committed was the editorial team’s opposition to the idea of helping the poor that it presented Republican Majority Leader Mitch McConnell as a voice of sanity in Washington.

This does not mean that the *Post* was against direct payments to all people. In fact, all

Postemployees [received](#) a \$2,021 bonus from management in January as a gesture of appreciation for their work during the pandemic. Two grand for me, not for thee.

Junk-food news

The point of a fourth estate is that it is supposed to shine a light on the powerful and hold them to account. But when corporate media are largely owned and sponsored by the super wealthy themselves, the claim that this is what they do is increasingly hard to maintain. In the Soviet Union, everybody was aware that the media was controlled by the state. But in a corporate state like the U.S., a veneer of independence is still maintained, although trust in the media has been [plummeting](#) for years.

While *The Washington Post* presents itself as an adversarial publication standing up to power, the fact that its senior staff constantly comes to such a hardline neoliberal elitist consensus on so many issues shows how little ideological diversity there is among its staff. Democracy dies at *The Washington Post* editorial board.

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