

Washington Post cartoonist resigns after paper kills her scathing sketch depicting Bezos and other oligarchs bowing before Trump

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In the lead-up to President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration, corporate newspapers and media companies that previously postured as defenders of "democracy" and opponents of "authoritarianism" are now bending the knee before the aspiring dictator by censoring political cartoons critical of him and his government, which serves the financial oligarchy.

Last week, Ann Telnaes, an award-winning editorial cartoonist, resigned from the Jeff Bezos-owned *Washington Post* after the billionaire-owned paper suppressed a political cartoon she submitted. The cartoon depicted Bezos and other oligarchs genuflecting before Trump on a throne. Bezos, the former CEO of Amazon and the second-richest person in the world (behind Trump's wealthiest benefactor, Elon Musk, owner of X), bought the *Post* in 2013 for a reported \$250 million.

It is clear why the *Post's* increasingly right-wing editorial staff reacted negatively to Telnaes' incisive political cartoon. Upon seeing it, one immediately recalls John Heartfield's famous 1932 work, "The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little Man Asks for Gifts. Motto: Millions Stand Behind Me!"

In Heartfield's rendition, a puny Hitler holds out his hand to receive money from a rotund banker. In Telnaes' sketch, a dumpy Trump, standing on a Roman pedestal, receives moneybags from the world's wealthiest people and corporations.

Both commentaries accurately depict the central role of the bourgeoisie in politically and financially promoting fascists and fascism to serve their class interests.

Substack explaining her and the cartoon, Telnaes wrote that she had worked at the paper since 2008. While she had previously received "editorial feedback and productive conversations—and some differences—about cartoons I have submitted for publication. ... I've never had a cartoon killed because of who or what I chose to aim my pen at. Until now."

She added that while it was not "uncommon for editorial page editors to object to visual metaphors" if they are "unclear" or fail to convey the intended message, such "criticism was not the case regarding this cartoon." She stressed that she had "never" had a sketch rejected "because of the point of view inherent in the cartoon's commentary. That's a game changer ... and dangerous for a free press."

In an interview with NPR posted on January 5, Telnaes reiterated: "I've never, ever, since I've worked for the *Post* in 2008, been not allowed to comment on certain topics by having cartoons killed."

"We have to have the freedom to say what we want to say," she added. "We are visual opinion makers."

The Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist wrote on her Substack that the cartoon "that was killed criticizes the billionaire tech and media chief executives who have been doing their best to curry favor with incoming President-elect Trump. There have been multiple articles recently about these men with lucrative government contracts and an interest in eliminating regulations making their way to Mar-a-lago. The group in the cartoon included Mark Zuckerberg/Facebook & Meta founder and CEO, Sam Altman/AI CEO, Patrick

Soon-Shiong/*LA Times* publisher, the Walt Disney Company/ABC News, and Jeff Bezos/*Washington Post* owner.”

In a statement to NPR and other outlets, *Post* Editorial Page Editor David Shipley defended the decision to censor the cartoon while claiming it was simply a question of “repetition.”

He wrote, “Not every editorial judgment is a reflection of a malign force. ... My decision was guided by the fact that we had just published a column on the same topic as the cartoon and had already scheduled another column—this one a satire—for publication. The only bias was against repetition.”

The only “repetition” at play here is Bezos and the oligarchy tipping the scales toward Trump and dictatorship. Leading up to and after the election, all of the figures and corporations depicted in the cartoon have debased themselves before Trump to strengthen their relationships—and their bottom lines—with the incoming administration.

In October, Bezos blocked a planned *Post* endorsement of Vice President Kamala Harris, prompting the resignation of several pro-Democratic Party editors and writers and a collapse in subscriptions. NPR reported that as many as 300,000 *Post* readers have unsubscribed since October. In December, Amazon announced it would be “donating” \$1 million to Trump’s inauguration fund.

The week before Bezos killed the *Post* endorsement of Harris, billionaire *LA Times* owner Patrick Soon-Shiong similarly blocked a Harris endorsement by the *Times*.

After previously donating millions to Democratic Party candidates, the *New York Times* reported in November that Meta CEO Zuckerberg held at least two private phone calls with Trump over the summer before meeting him for dinner at Mar-a-Lago after the election. Following the dinner, several outlets reported in December that Zuckerberg was donating \$1 million to Trump’s inauguration fund.

Likewise, after previously donating to President Joe Biden’s 2024 election campaign, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman personally gave Trump \$1 million for his inaugural fund, according to reports in *Business Standard* and other outlets in mid-December.

As for Disney/ABC, depicted in Telnaes’ cartoon by

a prostrate Mickey Mouse, the company capitulated to a Trump defamation lawsuit last month by agreeing to pay \$15 million to Trump’s online presidential library and \$1 million to Trump’s legal team.

While all the major capitalist papers and media companies serve as quasi-official tools of the US national security apparatus and imperialism, the fact that the ruling oligarchy—after monopolizing all the major media companies—is now suppressing political cartoons and endorsements, with barely a whisper from the Democratic Party, underscores the complete abdication of any defense of democratic rights by all sections of the ruling class.

Indeed, the actions of media companies align closely with the broader response of the Democratic Party. Rather than mobilizing opposition to Trump’s authoritarian agenda, the Democratic Party has pledged cooperation and collaboration with the incoming administration.

On the other end of the social pole, since Shipley censored Telnaes’ cartoon, it has gone viral on social media. Several retweets of the cartoon have garnered millions of views and supportive comments, with many expressing hostility to the dominance of a small group of billionaires over all aspects of social and political life.



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