

Brinkwire

Revolution sweeping newsrooms sees journalists who deviate from liberal orthodoxy hounded out

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You might never have come across Bon Appetit, a glossy monthly magazine which serves up a cosy mix of gourmet recipes, wine reviews and lifestyle tips to its 1.5 million readers.

It is hard to imagine a less controversial publication, or one that's more quintessentially American with its aspirational blend of self-improvement and conspicuous consumption – and it has been attracting record digital subscriptions thanks to lockdown tips for banana bread and avocado toast.

But popularity counted for nothing when a picture appeared online showing its editor of ten years, Adam Rapoport, dressed as a Puerto Rican at a Halloween fancy dress party. At a stroke he was out, branded a racist.

Then, in a grovelling mea culpa, he confessed: 'From an extremely ill-conceived Halloween costume 16 years ago to my blind spots as an editor, I've not championed an inclusive vision.' He added he was stepping down 'to reflect on the work that I need to do as a human being and to allow Bon Appetit to get to a better place.'

Never mind his successful record as an editor. Or that the picture was taken in 2004, a full six years before he joined the magazine. Or that Mr Rapoport denies applying make-up. Or that he is actually married to the Puerto Rican woman pictured alongside him in the photograph.

But nothing can be taken for granted amid the toxic maelstrom now sweeping through American journalism, from the lofty heights of the New York Times to the least consequential website. They're calling it The Great Awakening and it endangers not just thousands of experienced, hard-working reporters and editors but the future of the industry they work for. It even threatens American democracy itself.

This is a country where freedom of speech and religion are guaranteed under the First Amendment. But it is also a nation where the statues of Washington and Jefferson, the great architects of the Republic, the guarantors of the liberties that woke warriors take for granted, have been pulled to the ground and smeared with graffiti.

America brought popular journalism and the true scrutiny of power to the world, yet never have the country's newsrooms been so threatened – or so cowed – as today. So great is the pressure to conform to messages put forward by movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo that any deviation leads to instant vilification online. And, ultimately, the chopping block.

One exasperated newspaper editor told The Mail on Sunday: 'There is a revolution going on in newsrooms across the US and it goes against everything freedom of the press stands for.'

‘Surely the whole point is to tell both sides of a story, even if it means publishing the views of someone who doesn’t believe the things you do? Well, in today’s culture all that is out the window.’

The prevailing atmosphere is so toxic that white writers are now fearful of publishing anything controversial in case it kills their career. One long-time editor at a major East Coast publication said: ‘No one is against change and everyone realises white middle-aged men have dominated editorial boardrooms for too long. But this ‘Great Awakening’ is causing irreparable damage.

‘Newspapers such as the New York Times have always prided themselves on publishing ‘All the news that’s fit to print’. And that means telling both sides of a story in a fair and impartial way.

‘The Times has always been liberal but now the woke brigade is eating its own. It’s happening in publications large and small.’

The bodies are piling up. Stan Wischnowski, a Pulitzer-prize winning 20-year veteran of the Philadelphia Inquirer, was forced to quit as senior vice president and executive editor after publishing an article with the headline ‘Buildings matter, too’ about the effects of protests on the city’s historic buildings.

Dozens of black and minority staff members walked out of the 191-year-old newspaper in disgust at the headline for playing on the rallying cry ‘Black Lives Matter’. They signed ‘an open letter from journalists of colour’, which read: ‘We’re tired of shouldering the burden of dragging this 200-year-old institution kicking and screaming into a more equitable age.

‘We’re tired of being told of the progress the company has made and being served platitudes about ‘diversity and inclusion’ when we raise our concerns. We’re tired of seeing our words and photos twisted to fit a narrative that does not reflect our reality. We’re tired of being told to show both sides of issues there are no two sides of. Things need to change.’

British-born anti-Trump conservative Andrew Sullivan is another casualty. He resigned from New York magazine last month after four years. In his final column he explained he was leaving to start his own online blog because he misses writing freely ‘without being in a defensive crouch’. He lambasted America’s mainstream media for its lack of contrary opinion and revealed that a ‘critical mass’ of staff at the magazine refused to work with him because of his critiques of ‘woke’ culture.

Mr Sullivan, 56, said: ‘This is increasingly the orthodoxy in the mainstream media, that any writer not actively committed to critical theory in questions of race, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity is actively, physically harming co-workers merely by existing in the same virtual space. ‘I miss just the sheer fun that used to be part of being a hack before all these dreadfully earnest, humour-free puritans took over the press.’

He accused US media of putting ‘the moral clarity of some self-appointed saints before the goal of objectivity in reporting’. And he cited George Orwell who said: ‘If liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.’

No one, it seems, is safe. Anna Wintour, editor-in-chief of American Vogue and long considered the most powerful female figure in US publishing, was forced to issue an extraordinary statement taking ‘personal responsibility’ for not encouraging more diversity at the fashion bible. ‘I want to say plainly that I know Vogue has not found enough ways to elevate and give space to black

editors, writers, photographers, designers and other creators,’ confessed London-born Wintour, the model for the icy, stiletto-sharp editrix in *The Devil Wears Prada*.

‘We have made mistakes, too, publishing images or stories that have been hurtful or intolerant. I take full responsibility.’

Wintour insists that she is going nowhere. But rumours of her imminent demise continue to swirl, with the editor of *British Vogue*, Edward Enninful, hotly tipped to replace her.

Nothing perhaps sums up the mood of ugly intolerance so well as the plight of the *New York Times*. Founded in 1851, the *Times* is an American cultural institution, nicknamed ‘The Gray Lady’ for its reputation as a sober and impartial paper of record.

But when it hired Bari Weiss to give an opposing view to the newspaper’s Left-of-centre politics, she was bullied by colleagues who branded her a ‘Nazi and a racist’ on social media.

‘The lessons that ought to have followed the election [of Donald Trump in 2016] – lessons about the importance of understanding other Americans, the necessity of resisting tribalism, and the centrality of the free exchange of ideas to a democratic society – have not been learned,’ she said.

‘Instead, a new consensus has emerged in the press, but perhaps especially at this paper: that truth isn’t a process of collective discovery, but an orthodoxy already known to an enlightened few whose job is to inform everyone else.

‘My work and my character are openly demeaned on company-wide [message boards] where masthead editors regularly weigh in. There, some co-workers insist I need to be rooted out if this company is to be truly ‘inclusive’, while others post axe emojis next to my name.’

Her resignation came on the same day as James Bennett quit as opinion editor after publishing a piece by Republican Senator Tom Cotton which urged President Trump to send in troops to quell continuing Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests.

A source said: ‘This was something being widely discussed in Washington but it was deemed a subject too dangerous for the opinion pages of the *New York Times*.’

Times workers threatened a walkout with employees mass-tweeting the sentence: ‘Running this puts Black @NYTimes staff in danger.’

Publisher AG Sulzberger initially defended Bennett saying ‘I believe in the principle of openness to a range of opinions, even those we may disagree with,’ but, within 24 hours, he bowed to the mob, issuing a grovelling apology saying ‘the essay fell short of our standards.’

Katie Kingsbury, the acting head of the opinion pages, told staff: ‘Anyone who sees any piece of opinion journalism, headlines, social posts, photos – you name it – that gives you the slightest pause, please call or text me immediately. That’s right, all *Times* employees are now empowered to report on those who deviate from the new moral mission.’ A former *New York Times* journalist told *The Mail on Sunday*: ‘The irony is the *Times* was enjoying a renaissance after President Trump got elected. Circulation figures were rising and online readership boomed. In Trump they had an easy target and one their readership enjoyed reading about.

‘But their wokeness and desire to be painfully politically correct has misfired. The idea that the Times is on a ‘new moral mission’ is insulting to those of us who devoted years of our lives to the pursuit of excellence, to accurately reporting stories, all sides of them. You can’t censure opposing opinion just because you don’t agree with it.

‘The worst thing now is that wokeness is creeping into the news agenda. There are no stories criticising the BLM movement because writers and editors live in fear of losing their livelihood if the mob comes after them. How can you run a newspaper that way? The answer is, you can’t.’

What, then, of Bon Appetit, the cookery magazine that found itself in such hot water? The publication has now apologised to its readers for publishing recipes from a ‘white-centric viewpoint’ and promised to hire more BIPOC staff, meaning Black, Indigenous and People Of Colour.

Today the lead item on the website features a place called Riot Ribs, a ‘mutual aid kitchen’ at the centre of the continuing Black Lives Matter unrest in Portland.

Perhaps the final word should go to Barack Obama, America’s first black President, who has warned: ‘One of the things I do worry about among progressives in the United States is a certain kind of rigidity where we say ‘Uh, I’m sorry, this is how it’s going to be’ and then we start sometimes creating what’s called a ‘circular firing squad’, where you start shooting at your allies because one of them has strayed from purity.

‘Change is complex and the world is messy. People who do really good stuff have flaws.

It gets more ludicrous with every passing day – and more sinister. Take the case of Professor Patricia Simon, from Marymount Manhattan College in New York, who made the mistake of failing to be sufficiently enthusiastic in the course of a Zoom meeting.

Accused of daring to nod off during discussion of an ‘anti-racist framework’ – a social-media picture seemed to support the claim that she fell asleep – Prof Simon faced nearly 2,000 demands that her contract of employment be terminated and she lose her livelihood.

‘I was not asleep as is implied at any point during the meeting,’ she said in her defence. ‘The photo was taken without permission when I was looking down or briefly resting my Zoom-weary eyes. I listened with my ears and heard the entire meeting.’

It’s a response worthy of 1960s China and the grovelling apologies forced upon the victims of Mao’s Cultural Revolution. But that would be appropriate, because a cultural revolution is exactly what is taking place in today’s America, where the woke mob has surrounded the citadels of democracy – newspapers, magazines, television stations and, of course, universities.

Dissenters live in fear. Serious debate is all but silenced.

A recent survey published by the respected Cato Institute reveals that 62 per cent of Americans say today’s political climate prevents them from saying things they believe because others might find their views offensive.

Just think about that: an overwhelming majority of Americans – across all political persuasions – have political opinions that they are afraid to share. It is positively Orwellian. How long until the same thing happens here – if it has not already? Even liberals are afraid, with a majority – 52 per

cent – feeling they have to self-censor before speaking or writing. The same applies to 64 per cent of people who consider themselves moderates, and 77 per cent of conservatives.

These numbers are higher than they have ever been – representing a true threat to democracy. And even more worrying for those who value the future of openness and political diversity is the intolerance of the young, who are driving so much of this frightening new trend. Forty four per cent of Americans under 30 support firing company executives if it is discovered they privately donate their own money to President Trump. Fifty per cent of people who call themselves strong liberals support firing Trump donors from their jobs.

This tide of aggression towards people who merely happen to hold opposing views cannot be written off as a blip, for it is clearly part of a wider trend that has engulfed other Western nations.

When America sneezes, it is never very long before Britain catches a cold. A British political tradition that has for decades prized tolerance of other people's opinions – even when, or indeed especially when, we disagree with them – is about to be tossed away.

Proof that the bacillus highlighted in the Cato Institute's troubling survey is already infecting Britain can be seen in the treatment of Stephen Lamonby, who lost his job as a university lecturer for saying 'the Jewish are the cleverest in the world' and that 'Germans are good engineers'. Mr Lamonby, interviewed in last week's Mail on Sunday, said these things in a one-on-one private conversation with a colleague, Janet Bonar, who denounced him to the commissars of Solent University in Southampton. Who then dismissed him. Quite apart from the fact Mr Lamonby was making these remarks in a private conversation rather than in a lecture to students, or in a public address at Solent, and nothing he said was offensive or demeaning about any race or group, they also happen to be true.

I'm happy to state here that I wholeheartedly support his conclusion about Jews.

Although they make up less than half of one per cent of the world's population, between 1901 and 1950 Jews won 14 per cent of all the Nobel Prizes awarded for Literature and Science, and between 1951 and 2000 Jews won 32 per cent of the Nobel Prizes for Medicine, 32 per cent for Physics, 39 per cent for Economics and 29 per cent for Science. This, despite many of their greatest intellects dying in the Holocaust.

Mr Lamonby is only the latest person to be cancelled for holding legitimate views, which by no coincidence often tend to be conservative and traditional ones. We are not so far away from the Thought Crime from Orwell's 1984.

Once all value judgments regarding races and peoples are banned, my profession – history and biography-writing – would become impossible. Take any example from history and try to explain what happened without making any statement to the effect that any group of people were better or worse at anything than any other group of people, and you will quickly appreciate it cannot be done, yet that is where the woke-finder generals are taking us.

'At the Battle of Hastings in 1066, Norman battle tactics – which were in no way whatsoever superior to Saxon battle tactics – won a victory after a Norman archer, whose expertise in archery was precisely equivalent to that of his Saxon counterpart – fired an arrow into King Harold's eye. Thereafter, the centuries of Norman rule in England were no better or worse relatively speaking than any other period of history.'

This is what the 'Solent' version will be like. In many cases, the 'cancelling' is self-administered. Last week, the president and chief executive officer of an organisation called Technical Safety BC in Vancouver told the Toronto Globe and Mail that she was removing the word 'chief' from her official title in acknowledgment of racism against people of colour.

Progressivist absurdity and intolerance was captured brilliantly in Malcolm Bradbury's witty book *The History Man*, set in a new university in the fictional southern English town of Watermouth where Howard Kirk, the Marxist post-modern professor, persecutes anyone who disagrees with him in the name of 'generating the onward march of mind, the onward process of history'. The treatment of Lamonby and Patricia Simon was thus foretold nearly half a century ago.

What this intolerance will do is to force the teaching of history underground. Indeed it already has: Professor Nigel Biggar of Oxford had to hold an academic conference on the British Empire as a private seminar amid fears of how it might affect the careers of the historians who took part. Academic papers will one day be distributed surreptitiously, like samizdat underground newspapers behind the Iron Curtain before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

That is the kind of world we are moving towards. For the truly concerning thing about the Cato Institute survey is not that quite so many people fear that they might lose their jobs if they express their opinions, but that they are clearly right to feel that way.