

Bourbons of the Press Straggle on in Defeat

by Conrad Black

PRESS & MEDIA



It was a brilliant inauguration, and the continued scrapping and strafing between the administration and the bedraggled, sodden mass of the press continues the execution of a new demarcation of power in the federal government that will prove benign. This week's issues themselves are not important; what is at issue is a contest between the attitudes of the press and the tactics of the administration.

The two signal facts, or "alternative facts" in the well-chosen parlance of the brilliant and engaging co-counselor and victorious campaign manager of the president, Kellyanne Conway, are that public approval of the national news media now stands at 14%, and the allegations the press are now making against the new administration are of no interest to

any serious segment of the public.

As a result of these facts, the continued press assault on Donald Trump is much less dangerous even than when it failed to derail his candidacy for the Republican nomination and the election. It was a matter of continuing astonishment, as the campaign unfolded, that his following grew despite his political incorrectness. His references to the danger of "Islamic extremism" and of undesirable forms of immigration, and his debunking of the fraudulence of global-warming claims and of confected charges of misogyny and racism against him, won him more supporters than opponents.

Just as there was an interval between Mr. Trump's nomination and the election, during which he became substantially less bombastic and, having rallied the Archie Bunker vote, pursued the less vocal but accessible center-right vote, there was a second interval, between the election and the inauguration, during which his more militant opponents grasped at straws to delegitimize the president-elect, or at least restrict his ability to act when Inauguration Day came.

The culmination of this effort came with the "Golden Shower" nonsense I [wrote about here last week](#), where supposedly reputable intelligence sources claimed that Mr. Trump had been involved in an unspecific series of illicit or dubious contacts with anonymous Russian officials and that he had sponsored a prostitutes' group-urination in a Moscow hotel-suite bed because it had once been occupied by the Obamas (with whom the Trumps exchanged mutually gracious farewells last Friday).

Even at this late date, Mr. Trump's reflexive opposition has no idea of the force and proportions of its crushing defeat. It was encapsulated in the raunchy entertainer and talented showman Madonna's two noteworthy contributions to the election process: her offer to give oral sex to any man who voted for Hillary Clinton, which caused a full-point decline in Mrs.

Clinton's position in the polls, and Madonna's words of enticement to the Women's Marchers (ostensibly against Trump but for no clear reason) in Washington on Saturday, that she had considered "blowing up the White House." Apart from being overreaction and a rather unsportsmanlike acknowledgement of the election outcome, it was, given that White House security is ensured by the U.S. Marines, the ultimate empty threat.

Two years ago, Donald Trump scrutinized the polls that showed that two-thirds of Americans thought the country was headed "in the wrong direction," that 90 percent were contemptuous of the Congress, and that 85% distrusted the national press, and he considered that while President Obama seemed to be popular with about half the people, he could not run again and it was a wide-open race to the White House.

Mr. Trump ran against all factions of both parties, and emphasized especially the allowance of 12 million unskilled Hispanics illegally into the country and the conclusion of trade arrangements that imported a great deal of unemployment into the United States. The press falsely accused him of calling alien migrants rapists and the *New York Times* invented the canard that he had mocked a handicapped person. (This is the fiction Meryl Streep was foaming at the mouth about several weeks ago.)

None of it worked and he was nominated easily, while Hillary Clinton had a Sisyphean struggle against the unfeasible Marxist senator Bernie Sanders. Once she was nominated, as Mr. Trump ran a more specific campaign advocating reform of immigration, trade, health care, taxes, and campaign finance, and the Democrats were without any positive argument for their reelection, Mrs. Clinton pulled out all the stops with the misogyny-racism argument, highlighted by the long-held secret weapon, the Billy Bush tape.

There was no truth to these charges against Mr. Trump and he replied with heavy fire much closer to home on the corruption

of the Clintons and the sexual exploits of President Clinton, and the result is history. The sexism-racism charges, virtually the entire Democratic campaign, have simply evaporated.

A series of absurd acts of reflexive denial ensued – the recounts and the incitements to members of the Electoral College to revoke their pledges (the only voting irregularities were part of the Clinton ground game in Wisconsin, and more Clinton than Trump electors changed their votes). The media played these challenges up, and then down.

Then came the Russian connection. Just as FBI director James Comey had been unable to control an internal revolt against the whitewash of Mrs. Clinton's illegal handling of her e-mails and was forced to acknowledge a problem, some element of the intelligence apparatus released the fatuous Golden Shower dossier, which no press outlet would touch until *BuzzFeed*, a barrel-scraping, muck-raking left-wing blog, put it out and CNN took it up with tremendous fanfare, claiming Herculean journalistic enterprise to have unearthed it. Mr. Trump called it "fake news [from] a pile of garbage," and it died.

President Trump gave a fierce inaugural address, which effectively repeated his campaign charge that the country had been misgoverned by both parties and all branches of government since the Reagan era. The much-anticipated violence was a few hundred anarchists in frogman suits smashing windows of non-political buildings, and the anti-Trump faction at the parade was peaceful, scarcely obscene, and not more than 10 percent of the total.

The press tried to minimize the turnout, comparing it to the last Obama inauguration. Washington is a 70% African-American city that voted approximately 93% for Mrs. Clinton, and that any appreciable number of Trump supporters was there at all was a considerable feat of logistics.

The administration countered the press's claims and a slanging match with the press and the new presidential press secretary followed, which the press has darkly warned will cause the administration problems. Ms. Conway was correct to say there were "alternative facts," by which she meant contrary opinions, but which the press, for their own purposes, interpreted as endorsing lies.

Jim Rutenberg of the *New York Times*, who had loyally but lamely defended CNN's airing of the Golden Shower piffle last week (while tacitly acknowledging that it was unfounded), warned darkly on Monday that the administration's credibility will be destroyed if it doesn't repair its relations with the media, which would entail appeasement of men and women who are practically unanimous in their hostility to Mr. Trump. It ill behooves an apologist for the veracity of the Golden Shower to accuse the always well-spoken Ms. Conway of fomenting lies.

So steeped in what Dr. Johnson called "the disingenuousness of years" is the Washington press, they still do not know what has happened. Donald Trump rallied the Archie Bunkers to win the nomination, added enough independents to win the election, counterattacked the press at every stage in the social media and through his talk-radio supporters, and is using the authority of his office to call out media lies through spokesmen. He is exploiting their high disapproval rating.

The Republican conservatives who deserted him, because he is not particularly conservative, will be back when they get a good look at the administration. It will include a Labor secretary who wants to decertify unions, an education secretary who wants to get rid of the teachers' unions, an energy secretary who wants to maximize oil and gas production, an EPA director who wants to dismantle the EPA while continuing to reduce pollution of air and water, a commerce secretary who is an articulate free-enterprise billionaire, the restoration of the Pentagon to the hands of a general for the first time since George C. Marshall, and a Treasury

secretary who once worked in Wall Street and is a capitalist, but not just a Warren Buffett tax-planner. Self-made billionaire financiers Steve Schwarzman and Carl Icahn will advise on business relations and on deregulation.

The Republican congressional majorities, with a reasonable amount of give and take with Democrats, something Trump excels at, will put the president's plan through, making him essentially the first president to deliver on his promises since Reagan (though Clinton had a fair go at it in his first couple of years).

There will be an increased level of economic growth, a reduction of most people's income taxes as well as corporate taxes, a reduction in crime and violence, and a consistent and sustainable foreign policy. The people will respond to that and the media will be unable to deform the record of the administration. There will be mistakes and there will be occasional episodes bordering on buffoonery (they have not been unheard of in that office).

But the establishment Donald Trump assailed, which reacted to his campaign with mirth, and then with rage, and then with desperation, is now cobbling together a rather contemptible guerrilla resistance. It will be ground to powder by what is emerging each week as a juggernaut that holds all the offices, has a clear mandate and program, and is installing a strong administration to reverse 20 years of national decline.

The Obamas, Clintons, and Bushes have left Washington; they had a few good innings, but they will not be back unless one of them a generation younger than these comes back meritocratically.

The press will not have rebuilt its credibility until it recognizes how terribly it has disserved the country from Vietnam and Watergate all the way to the Golden Shower. The Democrats, presumably, will get the hint and change course and

recruit better candidates; both sides come to bat. The press is like Talleyrand's description of the Bourbons returning to Paris in 1815 in the baggage train of Wellington's army: "They have forgotten nothing and they have learned nothing."

In a few more years the Bourbons were gone forever; the press will cling on, but they will not make or break administrations as they have and will not regain public confidence from one election to the next, and not before they have conducted a profound self-reappraisal with the help of the 85% of the public who don't believe them.

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