

Dissent Under Attack by Government and Corporations

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It is often hard to tell how close popular movements are to success or whether they are even a threat to the status quo power structure. Despite vigorous protests, it is common to worry whether or not movements are having an impact. One tell-tale sign is when government and big business interests take action to stop or silence a movement.

These days, there is a lot of push back against resistance movements in the United States. While it may be riskier for us when they fight back, it is a positive sign and means that the movement needs to escalate, build power and increase its pressure.

One [absurd example of suppression came from Los Angeles](#) where police are enforcing an ordinance that makes it a crime to speak longer than your allotted time when testifying before the city council. When someone goes 20 seconds more than the time they are allowed, police arrest the citizen.

Escalating Punishment for Protesters

This week, [the trial of nearly 200 people arrested at the inauguration of Donald Trump began](#). Each person going to trial is facing 60 years in prison. Their collective sentence, if convicted, would total 12,000 years.

Those going to trial were kettled by police during the J20 protest. The US Attorney for Washington, DC (since DC is not a state, it does not have a district attorney, but is prosecuted by the federal government) is prosecuting everyone, even if they were a legal observer, medic or reporter, in a collective punishment conspiracy.

A [registered nurse, who came from Pittsburg to use her medical skills](#) to support people, now finds herself facing 60 years in prison for being part of an alleged riot conspiracy. [Press freedom groups](#) have called on the prosecutor to drop charges against journalists.

The police response against the J20 black bloc protests was extreme violence. The [DC police deployed weapons on 191 occasions](#) during the Trump inauguration, including 74 sting-ball grenades (explosive 'rubber-ball' style grenades), firing six 40 mm Stinger rubber bullets, five foam batons, and one 40 mm Exact impact round and spraying large amounts of pepper spray. Even after protesters were captured in a kettling operation, body cam footage showed the police continued to fire tear gas at them.

A video obtained by Democracy in Crisis shows officers tossing grenades into the crowd. Some of the more than 70 grenades thrown hit people. [Those arrested also described sexual assault](#) by police.

The ACLU and the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund have filed civil suits against the DC police. The DC City Council hired the Police Foundation, a group of police [criticized as having a bias in favor of police](#), and even they found that the DC police may have violated their own rules. The Police Foundation has been criticized for its reports on police violence and abuse in Ferguson, MO and Charlotte, NC.

In another example, Standing Rock Sioux tribal member Chase Iron Eyes is being prosecuted in South Dakota for his role in the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline. He is being charged with starting a riot. Iron Eyes is lead counsel at the [Lakota People's Law Project](#) (you can donate to their defense of #NoDAPL resisters at the [Lakota People's Law Project](#) website.) [He and others charged in the protests plan to use a necessity defense](#) because of the imminent threat to their only source of water and the ways the pipeline and actions of the Trump administration undermine the law. It was necessary for them to protest because there was no alternative.

It is not only criminal prosecution that protesters face, the #NoDAPL protest is also [facing a civil case alleging racketeering](#) and filed by the law firm founded by Marc Kasowitz, Donald Trump's personal attorney. Energy Transfer Partners hired a security firm that also gathered information for a massive conspiracy lawsuit that was filed later against environmental groups. The suit alleges that defendants like Greenpeace and others' "objective was not to protect the environment or Native Americans but to produce as sensational and public a dispute as possible, and to use that publicity and emotion to drive fundraising."

The DC #J20 protest and #NoDAPL prosecutions are two egregious examples of many. As protests increase and impact business interests and government policies, the people in power will use whatever tools they can to try and stop the resistance movement. This should not stop activists, but it is something to consider when developing protest tactics so that we are positioned to defend ourselves while still protesting effectively.



Attacks on the Media and Internet

Critical to the success of movement actions is drawing public attention to them. A goal of popular movements is to grow by attracting more people to the movement, and especially

to divide power holders (e.g. political parties, elected officials, business people, the media) and bring them to support the movement. A key ingredient to accomplish these goals is the public knowing about the protest, which requires media attention.

The corporate mass media has always been a problem for movements seeking transformational change. At times, movements have been able to break through corporate media blockades and get their message out, but this is becoming increasingly difficult as [mass media is further concentrated](#) and controlled by government and big business. The Internet has been the great equalizer allowing people to create their own media through video, websites, and live stream and share them through social media. Now, that is under attack.

The founder of the Internet, [Tim Berners-Lee's vision for an "open platform](#) [is one] that allows anyone to share information, access opportunities and collaborate across geographical boundaries." Today he sees the Internet going into some "nasty storms," including the erosion of Net Neutrality, which will allow Internet providers to be gatekeepers and determine where people can go, what they can see and how quickly they can see it. He also notes the use of algorithms to control what people can find in web searches and he worries about click-bait advertising pushing fake news, which is sometimes done by artificial intelligence.

Berners-Lee writes that "[Net neutrality](#), which some have described as the 'first amendment of the internet,'" is being threatened by Verizon employee Ajit Pai who President Trump nominated to be FCC chairman. Pai just announced the [FCC plans to vote on December 14 to remove Net Neutrality](#) rules that were won in 2015.

Join our [Protect The Internet campaign](#) and take action at this critical time. [Sign up here](#) if you can come to DC to protest the vote.

Berners-Lee believes "the internet should remain a 'permissionless space for creativity, innovation and free expression.'" ISP's should not be able to pick winners and losers or throttle services that they oppose or who do not pay enough money, rather they should be treated like public utilities that provide equal service to everyone.

In addition to mass media being more concentrated, Russiagate is being used as an excuse to weaken alternative media, like Russia Today (RT), the US-based Russian network. [Chris Hedges describes](#) RT being required to register as a foreign agent as a horrendous blow to press freedom. Hedges puts it into the context of the clamp down on dissent, writing it is "driven by RT America's decision to provide a platform to critics of American capitalism and imperialism, critics who lambast a system of government that can no longer be called democratic. And it is accompanied by the installation of algorithms by Google, Facebook and Twitter that divert readers away from left-wing, progressive and anti-war websites . . ."

Popular Resistance has been affected by [the new algorithms](#), with a decline in our readership by 60 percent since they were instituted. That's why we need you to share our articles on social media so we can reach more people.

Congress is playing its role in heightening fear in order to quiet criticism of the government on social media. At a recent hearing, [Clint Watts, a retired Army officer who purports to be an expert on Russiagate](#), testified that there needs to be a government-imposed censorship of the media. He demanded that "government news inquisitors drive dissident media off the

internet.” No elected official responded negatively to his call for censorship.

In fact, [Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate used hearings focused on social media outlets](#) to call for censorship. They used extreme language to describe social media with Senator Feinstein calling it “cyber warfare.” Democratic Congressman Adam Schiff, after describing Russian influence in the media, went on to say “its not just foreign” accusing Facebook and Twitter algorithms as having the “consequence of widening divisions among our society.”

Google testified that they fact check labels to spot fake news testifying, “at Google search, we have updated our quality guidelines and evaluations to help surface more authoritative content from the web.” He was describing the new Google search algorithms that result in sites like ours being undermined by suppressing our articles when people search terms.

The “fake news” meme is being used to curtail foreign media, independent media and social media even though we know that the most common source of false news comes from the corporate mass media. They put forward the news from the perspective of the government and big corporations to support the concentration of wealth and militarism, among other issues. Part of our job as activists is to point out their lies and falsehoods. Responding to the attack on RT, [peace activist and former Green Party vice presidential candidate Ajamu Baraka wrote](#) that CNN, the New York Times and Washington Post should be required to register as “agents of capitalism.”

Responsibility of the Movement

These attacks on dissent in court and in the media are reasons for the movement to escalate. The popular movement is having an impact and both government and businesses are noticing it. While they continue their policies of concentration of wealth, as well as environmental destruction and war, they know people are organizing, responding and resisting. The conflict must continue to be heightened and we must stand clearly for equal justice under the law, freedom of speech for all, and continue to urge economic, racial and environmental justice as well as peace.

Now that we know that government and business are concerned about movement actions, we must expect infiltration where they try to build legal cases against movements. [Infiltration has been a common tool used against movements](#). When we plan our actions, we must expect criminal or civil prosecution and use tactics that protect us while still allowing the movement to proceed with aggressive, strategic and sustained actions.

When fellow activists are under attack, the movement must come to their aide, which is why we provided links to support [#J20](#) and [#NoDAPL](#) protesters facing prosecution. Everyone in the movement should know that they will not be alone when the power holders go after them.

And, with the attacks on the media, it becomes an important political act to re-post an article from Popular Resistance and other sites. It becomes a political act to tweet or forward social media posts. Our job has always been to spread the word and actions of the movement, now that becomes even more important.

Let these attacks by government and big business become reasons to grow and unify the

movement. There are people in the government, including in law enforcement, as well as people who work for corporate interests, including corporate media, who will recognize these actions as going too far and defect. We must pull these people into the movement, urge them to join us and to use their position as an insider to expose what is occurring.

Every attack on the popular movement is more reason for us to join together, grow and mobilize. Every attack must be turned into an opportunity for us to build the strength of people power. We do not know how close we are to victory, but there is no question if we use political judo to turn their abuse of power against them, the movement will be stronger.

Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers are co-editors of Popular Resistance.

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