

War on Press Freedom in the US

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Cops on US streets are instruments of state power.

Serving and protecting privileged interests at the expense of the public welfare, they follow orders from higher authorities in their departments, handed down from the ruling class at the federal, state and local levels.

Though mandated by the Constitution's First Amendment, speech, press, and academic freedoms are threatened in the US.

Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange are Exhibits A and B. They're not alone.

In a post-9/11 climate of fear-mongering, dissent is increasingly considered a threat to national security.

Losing or otherwise compromising this fundamental right jeopardizes all others.

Historian/anti-war activist Howard Zinn called dissent "the highest form of patriotism."

Thomas Jefferson once said "(w)hat country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance."

He also said free speech "cannot be limited without being lost."

In *Texas v. Johnson* (1989), Supreme Court Justice William Brennan said

"if there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea offensive or disagreeable."

Justice Thurgood Marshall added:

"Above all else, the First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression (regardless of stated) ideas...subject matter (or) content."

"Our people are guaranteed the right to express any thought, free from government censorship."

The right applies to peaceful public assemblies and protests — to express whatever beliefs or messages people in the streets want conveyed to federal, state and local authorities.

Interfering with this right by cops or anyone else is a flagrant constitutional breach.

Yet time and again in the US it happens, guilty parties virtually never punished, just their innocent victims.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), US cops nationwide committed “at least 125 press freedom violations” in the first three days of street protests following Minneapolis African American George Floyd’s killing by 4 city cops.

“We are horrified by the continued use of harsh and sometimes violent actions of police against journalists doing their jobs,” said CPJ program director Carlos Martinez de la Serna, adding:

“These are direct violations of press freedom, a fundamental (US) constitutional” right.

“We call on local and state officials to explicitly exempt the news media from curfew regulations so that journalists are able to report freely.”

The CPJ Press Freedom Tracker is investigating police breaches of First Amendment rights, confirmed incidents to be added to its database and published for the public to see.

Journalists are being targeted by cops for doing their job, harmed by rubber-coated steel bullets, tear gas, concussion grenades, pepper spray, and other hostile actions against them.

Los Vegas Review-Journal photojournalist Ellen Schmidt and freelance journalist Bridget Bennett were arrested by city cops and charged with a “failure to disperse” misdemeanor by local authorities.

A Minnesota Public Radio journalist said a city cop pointed a gun at her head, menaced her with it even after identifying herself as a fourth estate member.

On May 29, photojournalist Linda Tirado was struck in her left eye by a police rubber bullet, her sight lost in the eye because of unacceptable police brutality.

She and other journalists didn’t didn’t sign up for combat duty. They’re on US streets to report on days of justifiable protests and how their rights are respected or denied.

Image on the right: Nicole Roussel’s wounds from police attack in DC. Photo from Sputnik



Sputnik Journalist Nicole Roussel, reporting on peaceful Washington, DC protests near the White House — clearly ID’d by her press badge — was struck multiple times by rubber-coated steel bullets and stinger grenades fired by cops, leaving painful welts on her body.

Other journalists near her were mistreated the same way.

In response to Roussel’s mistreatment, a Russian Foreign Ministry statement said the following:

“With concern we have to note that the situation with media rights in the United States is deteriorating with every day” — notably happening within feet of the White House.

Russian news agency Rossiya Segodnya’s director Dmitry Kiselev slammed what happened to Roussell, saying:

Police “directly targeted (her) even after she showed him her press card and shouted that she was with the press,” adding:

“She fell while covering the riots at the White House and got up. He shot her anyway.”

“Even the ‘do not kick a person who is down’ rule does not apply to an American policeman.”

“Of course, he will go unpunished, and next time he will shoot at a journalist again.”

It’s because US dark forces at the federal, state and local levels let them operate this way, wanting the message controlled, truth-telling on vital issues suppressed — especially video and photos worth 1,000 words.

In Minneapolis, Russian journalist Mikhail Turgiev was also targeted by city cops — struck with pepper spray while covering protests.

After an Australian journalist was targeted the same way in Washington, its government called the incident “nothing short of wanton thuggery.”

These incidents happen with disturbing regularity in the US because the nation’s ruling authorities do nothing to stop them.

It’s one of many examples of US police state injustice, mocking fundamental international and constitutional rights breached by the nation’s ruling class members and cops serving their interests — at the expense of governance of, by, and for everyone equitably as the law demands.

On May 31, CPJ published a Safety Advisory on how journalists can protect themselves from unacceptable police harassment, threats, and assaults.

Any fourth estate member needing legal help can call the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press hotline at 1-800-336-4243.

They can also email hotline@rcfp.org for further help.

Like thousands of other Black Americans killed by US cops throughout years of racist injustice, George Floyd was a homicide victim.

The rule of law in America died in similar fashion long ago. Police state criminality replaced it.

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