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Freedom of expression under surveillance



Who's attacking who? Freedom via alexskopje/Shutterstock

Sources: Rebellion

Rebels, dissidents or simply uncomfortable researchers are the natural target of the machinery of power. Its most common instruments (before persecution and imprisonment, as is the case with Julian Assange and Edward Snowden) are harassment and disqualification.

In 1999, the Washington House of Representatives approved president Clinton's *impeachment* process for his sex scandal with fellow Monica Lewinsky. The decision and certain removal of the president passed to the Senate, dominated by the

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Republican Party. To do this, two-thirds of the votes were needed, a number assured according to the manifest intentions of the senators who wanted to see the president leaving through the back door of history.

Lost for lost, the president's defense hired Larry Flynt, the Mughal of world pornography, magazine owner and producer of films of the genre. With almost no time, Flynt paid for a full page in the *Washington Post* by offering a million dollars to those who could try stories similar to the president's, starring members of Congress. Thousands of calls and recordings fell immediately. Flynt didn't even bother to listen to them.

Fearful of public scandals, some lawmakers began confessing infidelities to their wives. The most important voice in favor of *impeachment*, the speaker of the Lower House and representative of the ultraconservative state of Louisiana, Bob Livingston, mysteriously resigned on the same day that it was due to vote. From then until today, Bobby has been *lobbying* in Washington (i.e., visiting lawmakers in their offices and inviting them to parties to talk about business). Suddenly, the condemning majority in the Upper House became a minority. Ten Republican senators voted to pardon the Democratic president. From the obligation to stone to death the infidel, legislated in the Old Testament, he passed, in a few days, to the love of the New Testament: "Go, son, and sin no more." The president was pardoned.

This resource of the enchastre of others is old known among the agents of cia and the NSA. But the private industry of enchastre and intimidation is also a private business. The most frequent clients of these companies are powerful politicians and other private companies with extortion power in their noble struggle for "free enterprise" and "free competition." Although little known, the business of persecuting political adversaries or independent dissidents is multi-billion. Not coincidentally, these private corporations share the same ideology with secret government agencies, although the austerity policies of governments always reach those at the bottom; never to corporations or secret agencies, the true "invisible hand of the market."

Not coincidentally, this resource is always exercised from the top down, especially on those from below who may represent an obstacle or a danger to their interests, such as critics, researchers and independent journalists.

In June 2022, it was revealed that young journalist Nate Monroe of the Times Union of Jacksonville, Florida, had been surveilled and photographed by an Alabama consulting firm, whose slogan is "*We Solve Problems.*" A photograph that was made public shows him chatting with his girlfriend in the yard of their home. Monroe's sin was to do a decent job of researching the attempted privatization of Jacksonville's electric giant JEA, which was later revealed to be a deliberate and corrupt plan by its own directors, applying the old strategy of the neoliberal recipe: to make a public company inefficient so that public opinion supports its sale to the efficient private. Again, the invisible hand of the market.

A few months earlier, former public company executives Aaron Zahn and Ryan Wannemacher had been charged with conspiracy, but released after posting bail of one hundred thousand dollars each. The idea of the former directors, as reported by the *Dayly Record* of Jacksonville, was to receive several million dollars in case they managed to privatize the public company, valued at more than 11 billion dollars.

According to information revealed by the *Florida Times Union*, recognized by the Alabama company itself, the file on the Monroe consists of 72 pages and includes "*your financial history, your political affiliation, the names and phone numbers of your relatives and neighbors, your Social Security number, the brand of your car, your driver's license numbers, the patent on his car and the places where he has lived since his childhood.*"

University of Florida journalism instructor, Associated Press editor and Pulitzer Prize winner Ted Bridis told *reporters that "it's really anti-American to be watching journalists."* It doesn't matter that we know that the NSA reads and listens to millions of messages per year. Whenever a case of corruption or dubious morals is revealed in this country, it is described as *un-American*, it does not matter if it is a tradition with a history of a couple of centuries.

Once the powerful slaveholders of the South were defeated in the Civil War (powerful for their disproportionate power in Congress, for the country's greatest fortunes due to slavery, and for a racial and religious fanaticism that endures to this day), they were replaced by the growing power of corporations. The most powerful entrepreneurs continued the practices of exploitation, dehumanization and concentration of the wealth of the slavers, only that since the late nineteenth century slaves were replaced by wage laborers and, in

the same way, were demonized as dangerous individuals who wanted to subvert the order of God, according to which freedom, civilization and progress exist thanks to those at the top.

Unlike personalist dictatorships or civic-military juntas, liberal democracies often accept what is summarized in the First Amendment in the United States. Thanks to this first *Article of the Bill of Rights*, the right to express an opinion is protected from the threat of ending up in jail. It's no small feat. Naturally, the limitations to this right and the resources of power to limit this basic right of those below are manifold.

Journalists, however good they may be, are limited by the editorial lines of the media in which they work, which, in turn, are conditioned by their clients, that is, no longer the readers on whom they depended almost exclusively, but on the big advertisers, who, naturally, subscribe to a certain class ideology.

Rebels, dissidents or simply uncomfortable researchers are the natural target of the machinery of power. Its most common instruments (before persecution and imprisonment, as is the case with Julian Assange and Edward Snowden) are harassment and disqualification. But democracy, freedom of expression and the less recognized "right to the truth" do not exist by the great concentrated powers but in spite of them; they do not exist in spite of the rebels and dissidents but thanks to them.

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