

Journalists and Dissent Under Attack In The United States

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Global Research, January 26, 2017

[Popular Resistance](#) 25 January 2017

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Police State](#)
& [Civil Rights](#)

After the inauguration protests we received this alert from Reporters Without Borders about journalists arrested for covering the protests in Washington, DC. One of the reporters, Alexander Rubinstein of RT America, we knew from his coverage of protest actions in DC.

RSF calls on Washington, DC authorities to drop felony charges against journalists

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is concerned to learn that multiple journalists are being charged with participating in a riot and face up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for covering inauguration protests Friday. RSF calls on the Washington DC authorities to drop all felony riot charges against journalists who were merely doing their job to report the news.

RSF learned over the weekend of the arrest of RT America's Alexander Rubinstein and Vocativ's Evan Engel while covering protests and riots that broke out in Washington, DC on Inauguration day. We are [concerned](#) to learn today that they are facing serious felony charges, along with [other journalists](#) for coverage of the same protests.

Follow RSF's reactions on this and other press freedom issues on [twitter](#).

[The Guardian reported](#) that six journalists, including Rubinstein, were arrested at the DC protests writing:

A documentary producer, a photojournalist, a live-streamer and a freelance reporter were each charged with the most serious level of offense under Washington DC's [law against rioting](#), after being caught up in the police action against demonstrators.

The Guardian learned of their arrests after [reporting on Monday](#) that the journalists Evan Engel of Vocativ and Alex Rubinstein of RT America had also been arrested and charged with felonies while covering the same unrest on Friday morning.

It is evident from a [video produced by Rubinstein](#) (below) it was evident he was reporting on what both protesters and police were doing. While covering the news, he was knocked to the ground by police, hit with pepper spray and a stun grenade; finally he was kettled with protesters and even though he identified himself as a journalist (as the other journalists seem to have done) was arrested and charged with the serious crime of rioting. Below are three social media video and photos that were highlighted by [RT America about Rubinstein's](#)

[arrest.](#)



Alexander Rubinstein @AlexR_DC

20 Jan

anti-capitalist #disruptj20 march
periscope.tv/w/a1DWzjF6WUt...



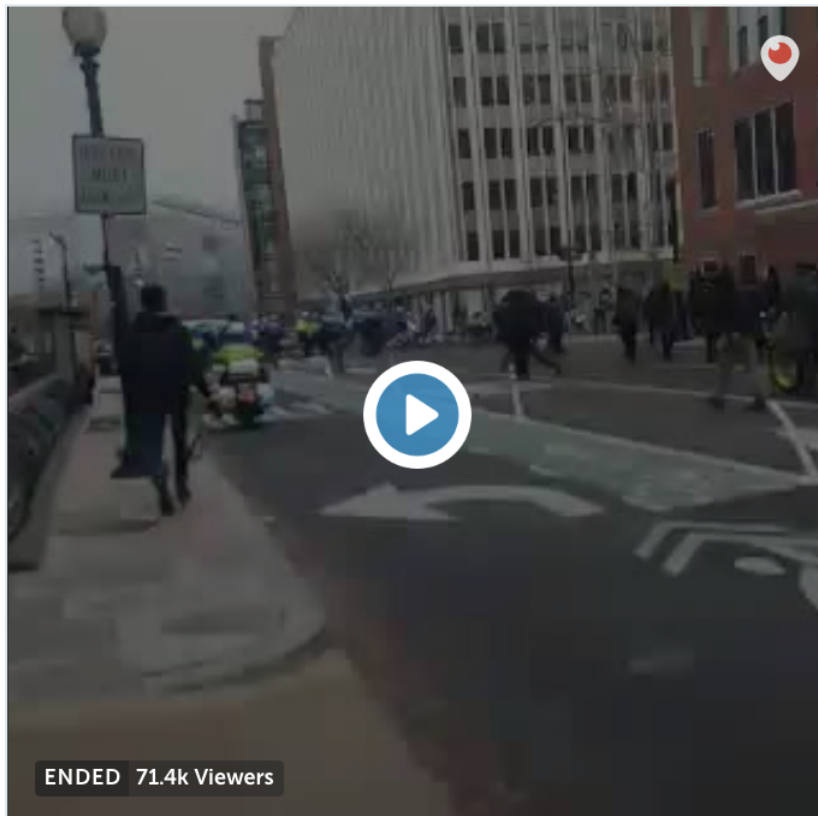
Global Revolution TV

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.@AlexR_DC on #Periscope: anti-capitalist #disruptj20 march
periscope.tv/w/a1DW2jFZTEVK...

10:47 AM - 20 Jan 2017



Alexander Rubinstein @AlexR_DC

anti-capitalist #disruptj20 march
periscope.tv

5 5



Alexander Rubinstein ✓
@AlexR_DC

Follow

Here is the flash grenade they used that blinded me and left my ears ringing. Cops encircled crowd when I couldn't see; arresting everyone

11:14 AM - 20 Jan 2017

499 308



Michael Loadenthal
@mloadenthal

Follow

Mass arrest about to happen of black bloc at 12&L st NW. [#disruptj20](#) lieutenant confirms everyone is being arrested including lawyers, press

11:47 AM - 20 Jan 2017

844 437

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has called for these charges to be dropped, with [Carlos Lauría, the CPJ's senior Americas program coordinator](#) saying "These charges are clearly inappropriate, and we are concerned that they could send a chilling message to journalists covering future protests. We call on authorities in Washington to drop these charges immediately."

[USA Today reports](#) 217 arrests on Friday in the hours around Trump's swearing-in as president. Police said that six officers suffered minor injuries. Other reports indicate some of the police injuries were not caused by protesters. [The Washington Post reports](#) that of the first three injuries to police "one officer fell from a bicycle and other was accidentally struck in the face by pepper spray fired by a another officer."

It is evident from video of the event that protesters were arrested en masse, without any individualized suspicion. [The District has not seen these types of mass arrests since the anti-globalization protests of 2002](#) and they [may violate](#) court-approved [agreements on how police should relate to protesters](#).

When we discussed these specific arrests with Chris Hedges over email his view was "This is just the start." [On our radio show](#), Hedges described how cowering the media is a key part of silencing dissent. If the media is not there to cover the mistreatment of protesters than law enforcement will become even more abusive.

Reporters Without Borders described the media as Public Enemy Number One for the Trump administration writing it is "alarmed by the new administration's repeated attacks on the media and blatant disregard for facts in the first three days of Donald Trump's presidency. . . In the first 72 hours since the 45th President of the United States took his oath of office, his administration has executed a coordinated attack on the media and demonstrated a clear disregard for facts."

Margaux Ewen, Advocacy and Communications Director for RSF North America, said:

It is clear that Trump views the media as his number one enemy and is taking every single opportunity to try to weaken their credibility. Any reporting he deems unfavorable to him, any reporting that does not jibe with his administration's message of self-aggrandizement, is called false and irresponsible. RSF reminds Trump's administration that the press does not provide public relations for the President, but reports the truth in order to hold government officials accountable, despite statements to the contrary from White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer. What's equally alarming is the repeated lies that Spicer and Trump's advisors are feeding to the press, despite irrefutable photographic evidence to the contrary."

The attack on dissent, whether it is the media or advocates, needs to increase in response to these bully tactics. If we are cowered the bullies will box people in and allow the normalization of the new Trump era as an era where people go along with extremism and police abuse. Our only path to retaining our dignity and our ability to be effective is to stand up against these actions.

We will keep you informed of actions that you can take to protect journalists and dissenters.

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