

Defend the Right to Report and the People's Right to Know

When the United States' founding fathers wrote the U.S. Constitution, the very first amendment they proposed was one to protect a free press. But two and a half centuries later, that concept and the people who pursue it are under attack and sometimes physical assault.

CWA is THE union for working journalists, representing more than 20,000 reporters, photographers, videographers and others. The president has called journalists "the enemy of the people" and "the most dishonest human beings on Earth." We've been arrested during protests in Ferguson, Washington, D.C., St. Paul, Baltimore and elsewhere for the "crime" of doing our jobs.

But it doesn't require coverage of a potentially chaotic scene such as a protest to get us handcuffed. Simply trying to question an official can do that, as happened in West Virginia, where a reporter was arrested for daring to question a Trump Cabinet member. Another reporter was manhandled when he tried to question the Federal Communications Commission commissioner.

A State Department official threatened a CNN reporter, demanding that she reveal her sources. A North Carolina legislator has taken to Twitter, where he criticizes stories he doesn't like by referring to them as being written by the "jihad media."

In May, the New York Times reported that former FBI Director James Comey asserted that President Trump urged him to consider arresting reporters who publish classified documents.

Most infamously, then-congressional candidate (and now congressman) Greg Gianforte attacked a member of the News Media Guild in Missoula, Mont.

Meanwhile, true journalists who report the facts are undermined when the president and others cry "fake news" about stories they don't like or when the president praises the man who believes the Sandy Hook killings never occurred or that children were sexually abused at a pizza restaurant in Washington, D.C.

Politicians who aim to discredit journalists do so because they want to hold onto power and we are the truth tellers who stand between them and their attempts to legitimize their reigns. An informed electorate is their biggest fear.

So it is not surprising that an increasing number of corporate interests and governments at all levels in the United States have launched a concerted campaign against the truth and one of their main targets are the people who search for it.

Attacks on journalism didn't start with the current administration, but they have increased in number and intensity. (We must remember that the Obama administration was no friend of a free press either. Among other infractions, Obama's Justice Department threatened for seven years to jail New York Times reporter James Risen because they wanted him to testify at the trial of a former CIA officer.)

The right to report is crucial to the health of a democracy, it is a citizenry's right to be informed, a right that is becoming increasingly endangered in the current political climate. U.S. leaders used to mock dictators of other nations who were so insecure in their hold on power that they would shut down a free press.

Today, more and more officeholders in the United States seem instead to be embracing that philosophy.

The NewsGuild and NABET Sectors of CWA call on all of CWA to support journalists, their right to report and the First Amendment.

Journalists are facing unprecedented attacks – including physical assault, arrest, and restrictions on access to information that was routinely provided just a short time ago.

These attacks are in conjunction with an all-out effort to demonize and discredit journalists and the truth they seek to tell.

The attacks threaten the very foundation of our democracy. They impede the people's right to know and undermine our ability to hold our government accountable.

Resolved: CWA supports the media sectors' efforts to fight the attacks on journalists and the First Amendment.

Resolved: CWA supports national and state legislation that would make it a felony to assault journalists, including reporters, photographers and videographers, and will support expansion of state shield laws.

Resolved: Journalists must be allowed to cover public events, report on protests, and question officials without fear of arrest or other forms of intimidation.

Resolved: CWA will work with the media sectors to promote alliances among groups that support journalists' ability to perform their work unfettered.

Resolved: CWA supports passage and enforcement of, and adherence to, Freedom of Information Laws at the federal, state, and municipal levels.