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Tips and Analysis

Real Free Speech Does Not Exist

by Patrick Carkin

The story below tells all . . .

Keep in mind that there's something bigger a stake here - intimidation and the effect it will have on _other future_ potential acts of free speech. The message gets across . . . you have "free speech," just don't challenge the government too bluntly. So we go around screaming about Janet Jackson's breast hanging out (hey, free speech to complain about nudity! it's freedom!) while the truly important issues are ignored.

<http://boston.indymedia.org/newswire/display/21845/index.php>

BOSTON STUDENT GETS FELONY CHARGES FOR IRAQ PROTEST

Joe Previtera, a twenty one year old student at Boston College, was arrested Wednesday and charged with felonies after dressing as a hooded Iraqi prisoner in front of a military recruitment center on Tremont St. in downtown Boston. In his arraignment today a Suffolk County District Attorney suggested that Mr. Previtera's bail be set at \$10,000. However, a National Lawyers Guild attorney and Mr. Previtera's mother, also an attorney, persuaded the judge to free Previtera on personal recognizance.

Previtera faces misdemeanor charges of disturbing the peace and felony charges of making a false bomb threat and using a hoax device. The charges apparently reflect the District Attorney's concern that Mr. Previtera might have been mistaken for a terrorist. Witnesses say that passersby seemed unconcerned by Mr. Previtera's actions.

After his release today, Previtera said his arrest took him completely by surprise. "I did this hoping that the image of an abused Iraqi prisoner might make people think twice about joining the military ... both for their own safety and because of the abuses they might be asked to committ. Is it reasonable that I face greater punishment for my free speech than do the soldiers who actually committ abuses? Well, this is post-911 America, isn't it?"

[END of Press Release]

I've been attending protest events of all kinds for more than ten years now. At many of them I was simply an observer. I took photos, notes etc. and then posted them to the web. I frequently analyzed and critiqued the techniques of various activists. And sometimes I complimented them on their effectiveness.

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I've covered a union strike in Flint, MI, a Native American protest in Santa Fe, NM, an anti-police brutality protest in Chicago, and probably a hundred anti-war protests.

What I've witnessed over the years has been quite clear. The larger protests - those that challenge the US government directly on issues such as globalization and war, are continually and progressively getting more and more difficult to participate in. The government, at various levels, is squelching free speech. Anyone who doesn't think so hasn't tried to truly express their dissent. The freedom of speech - TRUE freedom of speech - does not exist.

"Free speech zones" - Most common during presidential visits. They force the protesters to an area a mile away where no one sees them. Hey, they can protest, right?

Police tactics based on intimidation, not law. I've seen this countless times. Over and over. A police officer will frequently intimidate a protester with aggressive comments and threats. The protester will have the legal right to do what he or she is doing, but the police officer will force his hand by threatening an arrest. The arrest might be thrown out of court, but the goal is achieved. It stops the current protest and curtails future protests.

Arguments by authorities that are just stupid. The argument, as shown in the above example, is that "terrorists might participate" so we have to be careful. So let me get this, terrorists, who want to attack our government, are going to join a group of people who automatically draw attention to themselves and express hostility towards the government? Yeah, that makes sense. A terrorist with any brains would dress up in a suit and tie and pose as a Bush supporter in order to get closer to him. Only a dumbass would pose as a protester and expect it to be an effective tactic.

The sacrifice of who we are in order to protect . . . who we are. Totally throws the baby out with the bath water. We need to destroy freedom of speech in order to protect us from terrorists who want to destroy our way of life. Yeah, I get it.

Btw, these tactics I've seen under both Clinton and Bush (Sr. and Jr.) administrations. It's a bi-partisan effort. And yes, I most certainly oppose efforts by liberals to prevent anti-abortionists from protesting. In fact, those same laws passed against them are now being used against more liberal anti-war protesters. We either sink or float together on this one. Either you have REAL freedom of speech for all, or we might as well rip of the Bill of Rights. No one, wheether they be liberal or conservative, can truly protest now under the current laws and tactics.

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