

Louisiana sheriff initiates witch-hunt against author of anti-corruption blog

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Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's deputies conducted a home raid in South Louisiana last week as part of an effort to uncover the identity of a police officer who writes for a local anti-corruption blog. The self-described "underground watchdog group" blog, *ExposeDAT*, had repeatedly linked Sheriff Jerry Larpenter to corruption and fraud as part of a series of short articles published in June that detailed rampant criminality among local politicians and business figures.

The target of the raid was Houma Police Officer Wayne Anderson, a former Terrebonne Parish deputy, now suspected by Sheriff Larpenter to be the author of the blog. Anderson, however, has denied any involvement with *ExposeDAT*. "I'm not sure if they believe Mr. Anderson is actually the author of such work," stated Matthew Ory, Anderson's attorney. One is given the sense that in addition to the extraordinary nature of the raid itself, the department may not even have the right man.

Citing a bogus "criminal defamation" statute, Larpenter's deputies were able to obtain search warrants to seize evidence from Anderson's house and from Facebook. Six deputies raided the home, taking two laptop computers, one of which belonged to the officer's children, and five cell phones. The cited defamation statute was overturned by the US Supreme Court in 1964, ruling it as an unconstitutional violation of the First Amendment.

Explaining his reasoning to *WWL News*, Larpenter admonished: "If you're gonna lie about me and make it under a fictitious name, I'm gonna come after you."

On its webpage, *ExposeDAT* states its intention is to "explore the relationship between certain Public Officials and the flow of money in South Louisiana." The author, writing anonymously under a pen name,

describes the dealings between politicians and businessmen as "incestuous." Each article dealt with different members of the local political and business community of Terrebonne Parish, using legally obtained public records to link them to various shady dealings.

The articles posted on the blog have accused multiple public officials and business owners in Terrebonne Parish of nepotism, tax evasion, pollution and misuse of government funds. The Sheriff's office justified the raid with the claims that the blog had criminally defamed Tony Alford, the Parish's new insurance agent. The blog also pointed out that Sheriff Larpenter's wife managed Alford's office, and alleged that Larpenter gave Alford the sheriff's office insurance contract.

In a blog post titled "Gordon Dove and Tony Alford's Radioactive Waste Dumping," the author uncovered information concerning a trucking company co-owned by Alford and the Parish president Gordon Dove. The trucking company had been cited for dumping radioactive waste in eastern Montana, originally reported by a local newspaper in Missoula, Montana.

Dove had recently been appointed to the Louisiana House Natural Resource Committee by previous Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal. He now presides as chairman of the committee, which was tasked with raising awareness of coastal erosion and attempting to reverse the trend of receding barrier islands and coastal wetlands.

Sheriff Larpenter explained in a public statement that his department would investigate the blog with every intention of prosecuting its author(s). He indicated he would then "hand over" the investigation to District Attorney Joseph Waitz for prosecution. Waitz, who is

also featured on *ExposeDAT*, represents yet another conflict of interest to a just proceeding of the case.

It is clear that Anderson has become the center of a witch-hunt. Even though there is little chance of a successful criminal prosecution against him, he is, for all intents and purposes, ruined. Houma Police Chief Dana Coleman suspended Anderson from the force indefinitely, placing him on paid administrative leave. The official paperwork on the suspension has not yet been sent, though the chief cited a failure to “uphold the law” and that he had “committed conduct unbecoming of an officer.”

The department has not elaborated any exact wrongdoing by Anderson. It is no coincidence that the decision came a mere hour and a half after the raid by Sheriff’s deputies.

Jerri Smitko, Anderson’s attorney, offered a damning indictment of the entire case. “When decent, law abiding citizens try to speak out on matters of public importance, they’re treated like criminals,” Smitko remarked. “If this is what happens to a police officer with 12 years of impeccable service what the hell kind of justice do criminals get?”

While the charges are likely to be dropped due to lack of a legal basis, the raid should serve as a warning to the working class. This is not an isolated incident, but a particularly acute expression of a broader process taking place within the American ruling class as it moves toward more authoritarian forms of rule. The witch-hunt organized by Sheriff Larpenter is an act of intimidation meant to disrupt the lives of anyone who offers even the slightest opposition to the widespread criminality entrenched within the American political system.

The witch-hunt of Anderson is not simply an isolated issue of corrupt small-town politics. The petty corruption detailed by *ExposeDAT* is a pale shadow of the criminality at the highest levels of the American ruling elite, which in just the last 15 years is responsible for the deaths of more than a million of people across the Middle East, and has funneled hundreds of billions of dollars to Wall Street following the 2007-2008 financial crash, while driving down living standards and stripping the working class of health care and pension benefits.

The highest levels of the American political establishment are far less clumsy and far more ruthless

than local Terrebonne Parish officials in their approach to the suppression of democratic rights and social opposition. The brutal treatment of whistleblower Chelsea Manning and the witch-hunts against Julian Assange and Edward Snowden underscore their open embrace of police state rule.



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