

Anger over US police assault on Australian journalists in Washington DC

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Footage of heavily-armed riot cops in Washington DC attacking two Australian journalists on live television has provoked shock and anger, providing a graphic expression of the state violence being deployed against mass demonstrations in the US over the police murder of George Floyd.

The incident took place on Tuesday morning, Australian time, as US police repeatedly charged a peaceful protest near the White House in Washington.

The police riot was directly orchestrated by the Trump administration. It coincided with Trump's declaration that he would illegally deploy the military against protesters, in what amounted to a coup d'état against the American Constitution. The demonstration was being cleared so that Trump could walk the streets with hundreds of security personnel, before posing menacingly outside St John's Church with a bible in hand.

The two media workers, Channel 7's US correspondent Amelia Brace and cameraman Tim Myers, were doing a live cross to the "Sunrise" breakfast program, which is frequently viewed by half a million people or more around Australia.

Brace, clearly out of breath, explained that they had already been forced to run a block away from charging police. When the cross began, the cops were again lining up along the street with batons and shields raised. Within seconds, they charged the protesters, who began fleeing.

Brace and Myers were sheltering just off the footpath. As the police stampeded forward, an officer turned to the crouching reporters, battering Myers with a shield before punching him in the face. Brace screamed that they were media. The two were allowed to retreat, but as they did, another officer smashed his baton against Brace's back.

The "Sunrise" anchors were visibly shocked that their colleagues had been attacked on live TV. After they regrouped, Brace stated: "You heard us there yell that we were media, but they don't care. They are being

indiscriminate... They do not care who they're targeting at the moment." She later revealed that herself and Myers had been hit with rubber bullets earlier in the day.

In addition to the mass live audience, the "Sunrise" segment has been viewed by over eight million people on Twitter.

The incident was one of series over the past week in which US police have attacked journalists and media workers, as part of a deliberate onslaught against First Amendment protections of press freedom.

On Saturday, the WSWs noted some of the assaults that had occurred over the previous days: "MSNBC anchor Ali Velshi was shot in the leg with a rubber bullet while reporting live in Minneapolis. In Louisville, a local TV reporter and her cameraman were targeted and shot with pepper balls during protests Friday. A freelance photojournalist in Minneapolis was permanently blinded in her left eye after being shot by the police with a rubber bullet."

The response from the Australian political and media establishment has been decidedly muted.

Had Brace and Myers been assaulted by police in a country such as China or Iran, the official reaction would have been very different. Calls would likely have been raised for a high-level government apology; demands would be issued for retaliatory action against diplomats; sanctions would be threatened and the media would be full of stories about an "authoritarian regime" attacking "our values" of "press freedom and democracy."

Because the US is the Australian ruling elite's most significant military ally, and the guarantor of its own predatory operations in the Pacific, nothing of the sort has taken place.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who has closely identified himself with Trump, quietly asked the Australian Embassy in the US to "investigate the circumstances around the footage," as though there is any

doubt about what occurred.

Morrison, whose government has refused to condemn the state violence deployed by the US administration, had a private phone conversation with Trump shortly after his unprecedented attack on the US Constitution.

The contents of the discussion are not known, including whether Morrison explicitly endorsed Trump's effective coup. Ensuring that nothing obstructs the US-Australian military alliance, however, was undoubtedly among the topics covered. It appears that Morrison did not even mention the attack on the Australian journalists, with media reports improbably suggesting that, unlike millions of Australians, he was "unaware of it" at the time.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, the Australian government, with the full support of the Labor opposition, has intensified its role as a US attack-dog in its protracted diplomatic, economic and military campaign against China that threatens war in the Asia-Pacific.

Morrison and government ministers have echoed US condemnations of the World Health Organisation and spearheaded calls for an "independent inquiry" into the origins of COVID-19. At the same time the Trump administration was peddling extreme right-wing conspiracy theories that the pandemic was the result of a Chinese plot.

US ambassador to Australia Arthur Culvahouse Jr. released a statement on Wednesday, as footage of the assault on the journalists continued to widely circulate online.

Issued on behalf of a government overseeing a nationwide police rampage against peaceful protesters, reporters and even random bystanders, it proclaimed democracy and press freedom as "right[s] Australians and Americans hold dear," while vaguely stating that "we take mistreatment of journalists seriously."

Culverhouse had the gall to quote similar weasel-words, delivered by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on 2019's World Press Freedom day.

Pompeo, viewed internationally as a thug and a bully, had only recently orchestrated the illegal expulsion of Julian Assange from Ecuador's London embassy and the issuing of 17 US Espionage Act charges against the publisher. Pompeo has played a leading role in the attempt to destroy Assange over WikiLeaks' exposure of US war crimes, and is directly responsible for the attempt to extradite him from Britain to the US and lock him up forever in a CIA prison.

The hypocrisy from the Australian political establishment is no less blatant. Federal Labor opposition

leader Anthony Albanese branded the attack on the Channel 7 journalists as "unacceptable," declaring that "in a democratic society, the role of the media is critical." His party, however, began Australia's collaboration in the US-led vendetta against Assange, despite the fact that he is an Australian journalist and publisher.

The campaign against the WikiLeaks founder has formed the spearhead of a broader assault on press freedom.

The government last year oversaw federal police raids on the Sydney headquarters of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the home of News Corp political editor Annika Smethurst. The unprecedented police operations, accompanied by threats of criminal prosecution, were over stories exposing Australian war crimes in Afghanistan and plans for expanded domestic spying.

Labor had previously joined with the Liberal-National government in 2018, passing draconian "foreign interference" laws, making it a criminal offence for journalists to even receive "classified information" and extending jail terms for whistleblowers.

The assault on democratic rights, paralleling events in the US and internationally, is in preparation for the repression of social and political struggles by the working class.

The Australian establishment has reacted with nervousness to the upheavals in the US. Morrison has declared that there is "no need to import" the mass protest movement against police violence and Albanese has called for "unity" and an end to "division."

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of workers and young people have indicated they will take part in protests this weekend in solidarity with the US demonstrations, and opposing state attacks on Australian Aborigines.



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