

Utah woman charged with “hate crime” for allegedly stomping on, throwing away pro-police sign

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In an unconstitutional attack on the First Amendment and the right to protest, a 19-year-old Utah woman is being charged with a hate crime after allegedly crumpling up and throwing away a “Back the Blue” pro-police sign in front of a cop.

The *Salt Lake Tribune* first reported on an affidavit of probable cause submitted by an unnamed Garfield County police officer against the unidentified woman, who was charged last Friday. Local media reports confirm she is officially being charged with criminal mischief with a “hate crime” enhancement and disorderly conduct. The Class A misdemeanor criminal mischief charge is punishable by up to one year in jail and a \$2,500 fine.

The alleged incident took place last Wednesday at a gas station in the sparsely populated mountain town of Panguitch in south-central Utah. According to the affidavit, the woman threw away the “Back the Blue” sign in front of the police after they had ticketed her friend for speeding.

“I observed one of the friends ... stomping on a ‘Back the Blue’ sign next to where the traffic stop was conducted, crumple it up in a destructive manner and throw it into a trash can all while smirking in an intimidating manner towards me,” wrote the aggrieved deputy in the affidavit.

Pro-cop propaganda signs and the “thin blue line” modified black, white and blue US flag are popular among the far right and fascist elements, many of whom use the signs to signal their allegiance to the police and/or former President Donald Trump. During last summer’s historic protests against police violence following the police murder of George Floyd, counter-demonstrators and fascist militias frequently displayed

“Blue Lives Matter” flags and signs at protests in an attempt to intimidate and threaten anti-police-violence demonstrators.

After witnessing the “intimidating” act of a young woman throwing away a cardboard sign, the officer, equipped with a service pistol, a bevy of “less-lethal” options and the courts, decided to leave his vehicle to confront and question the woman about where she got the disposed of sign.

“I stated to [the woman] that our sheriff’s office produced those specific signs and that I believed she had acquired it in our community,” the cop wrote. The deputy noted in his affidavit that he checked with gas station workers who confirmed it was not their sign.

After being unable to determine where the woman acquired the pro-police sign, the cop proceeded to further question her, writing in his affidavit that she allegedly provided “inconsistent stories” before stating she found it on the ground.

“Due to [the woman] destroying property that did not belong to her in a manner to attempt to intimidate law enforcement, I placed her under arrest,” the deputy wrote, adding that she was taken and booked into jail. “Due to the demeanor displayed by [the woman] in attempts to intimidate law enforcement while destroying a ‘Pro Law Enforcement’ sign, the allegations are being treated as a hate crime enhanced allegation.”

The *Salt Lake Tribune* notes that the Utah Code defines “intimidate or terrorize” as “an act which causes the person to fear for his physical safety or damages the property of that person or another.” The code further states that the act “must be accompanied with the intent to cause or has the effect of causing a

person to reasonably fear to freely exercise or enjoy any right secured by the Constitution or law of the state or by the Constitution or laws of the United States.”

The use of “hate crime” enhancers has had no discernible impact on lowering the incidence of alleged hate crimes. The latest FBI annual Hate Crime Statistics Act (HCSA) report from 2020 showed that there were 7,314 hate crimes reported in 2019, up from 7,120 the year before—and the highest number since 2008, during which 7,783 such crimes were reported.

However, even these statistics do not tell the full picture. The definition of a “hate crime” varies from state to state, as 31 states consider hate crimes on the basis of gender while 17 states consider hate crimes on the basis of gender identity.

Furthermore, according to a May Politico analysis, while 45 states have some hate crime laws on the books, 36 states do not have any laws requiring police training for identifying and reporting hate crimes, and 20 states have no laws requiring local and state police to submit hate crime data to the FBI.

While the FBI defines a hate crime as an offense “motivated by bias toward race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, and gender identity,” within the last decade, amid skyrocketing inequality and large scale protests against an unending wave of police violence, Congress and state legislatures have advanced legislation that would add the profession of police, a personal choice, as a protected class.

In May 2016, Louisiana became the first US state to make police a protected class under hate crime laws. Less than five months later, New Orleans police charged a drunk man under the new law for using a racial slur against a police officer after he was already in custody.

In 2018, Crafton, Pennsylvania, police charged a black man with “ethnic intimidation” after he allegedly called the arresting officers “Nazis” and the “Gestapo,” again, after he was already in handcuffs.

The use of “hate crime” enhancers against the working class to further punish and intimidate is an international phenomena. In the UK, a March 2021 investigation by the BBC and the *Law Society Gazette* found that while only 7 percent of the 4,636 hate crimes cases recorded by West Midlands Police in the year ending March 2020 involved a police victim, 43

percent of the 711 hate crime cases that ended in charges showed that the police were the victims.

The phenomenon repeated itself in three other districts observed by the researchers. The Metropolitan Police recorded 21,948 hate crimes cases in 2019/20, 4 percent involving police victims, yet of the only 1,762 cases that resulted in charges, 29 percent of those cases involved a police victim. In West Yorkshire, 4 percent of the 8,774 recorded hate crimes cases involved police victims, yet 33 percent of the 694 hate crimes charged had a police victim.

The police function as an instrument of class rule. They do not exist to protect the rights of the working class, they exist to enforce capitalist rights to own private property and to profit. Any attempt to reform the police into protecting those who have been historically oppressed and marginalized through “hate crime” laws are, at best, misguided and, at worse, further empower the capitalist state.



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