

Biden DOJ Indicts Four Americans for “Weaponized” Free Speech

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The Biden administration’s Department of Justice has just charged four members of the African People’s Socialist Party (APSP) for conspiring to act as agents of Russia by using speech and political action in ways the DOJ says “weaponized” the First Amendment rights of Americans.

The Washington Post [reports](#):

Federal authorities charged four Americans on Tuesday with roles in a malign campaign pushing pro-Kremlin propaganda in Florida and Missouri — expanding a previous case that charged a Russian operative with running illegal influence agents within the United States.

The FBI signaled its interest in the alleged activities in a series of raids last summer, at which point authorities charged a Moscow man, Aleksandr Viktorovich Ionov, with working for years on behalf of Russian government officials to fund and direct fringe political groups in the United States. Among other things, Ionov allegedly advised the political campaigns of two unidentified candidates for public office in Florida.

Ionov’s influence efforts were allegedly directed and supervised by officers of the FSB, a Russian government intelligence service.

Now, authorities have added charges against four Americans who allegedly did Ionov’s bidding through groups including the African People’s Socialist Party and the Uhuru Movement in Florida, Black Hammer in Georgia, and an unidentified political group in California — part of an effort to influence American politics.

AFP [reports](#) that the conspiracy charges carry a sentence of up to ten years, with three of the four APSP members additionally charged with acting as unregistered agents of Russia

which carries another five years.

“Russia’s foreign intelligence service allegedly weaponized our First Amendment rights – freedoms Russia denies its own citizens – to divide Americans and interfere in elections in the United States,” said Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen in [the DOJ’s press release](#) regarding the indictments, adding, “The department will not hesitate to expose and prosecute those who sow discord and corrupt U.S. elections in service of hostile foreign interests, regardless of whether the culprits are U.S. citizens or foreign individuals abroad.”

Looks like the United States has decided to dispense with those freedoms as well.

This fake and racist case flows from the Russiagate hysteria that convinced millions of Americans that Russia was paying dissident groups to destabilize the US political system

The FBI was unable to find anything real, so it went after the African People’s Socialist Party <https://t.co/C1fUn2pyuW>

— Max Blumenthal (@MaxBlumenthal) [April 19, 2023](#)

The [superseding indictment](#) containing these charges consists of a lot of verbal gymnastics to obfuscate the fact that the DOJ is prosecuting US citizens for speech and political activities in the United States which happen not to align with the wishes of the US government. The grand jury alleges that the aforementioned Ionov “directed” these Americans to “publish pro-Russian propaganda” and “information designed to cause dissension in the United States,” which is about as vague and amorphous an allegation as you could possibly come up with.

For the record Omali Yeshitela, the founder and chairman of the African People’s Socialist Party and one of the four Americans named in the indictment, has adamantly denied ever having worked for Russia. Earlier this month before charges were brought against him, the Tampa Bay Times [quoted him](#) as saying, “I ain’t ever worked for a Russian. Never ever ever. They know I have never worked for Russia. Their problem is, I’ve never worked for them.”

But it’s important to note that this should not matter. Under the First Amendment the government is forbidden to abridge anyone’s freedom to speak however they want and associate with whomever they please, which necessarily includes being as vocally pro-Russia as they like and promoting whatever political agendas they see fit, whether that happens to advance the interests of the Russian government or not. The indictment alleges that the four Americans engaged in “agitprop” by “writing articles that contained Russian propaganda and disinformation,” but even if we pretend that’s both (A) a quantifiable claim and (B) a proven fact, propaganda and disinformation are both speech that the government is constitutionally forbidden from repressing.

It’s not reasonable for the government to just dismiss the First Amendment on the grounds that it is being “weaponized”. You can’t have your government dictating what speech is valid and what counts as “agitprop” and “disinformation”, because they’ll always define those terms in ways which benefit the government, thus giving more power to the powerful

and taking power away from the people. You can't have your government dictating what political groups are legitimate and which ones are tools of a foreign government, because you can always count on the powerful set such designations in ways which benefit themselves.

The US through the National Endowment for Democracy has created armies of organizations carrying out malign influence operations around the world including here in Thailand.

When the Thai government attempts to stop this activity, the US embassy shouts "free speech." <https://t.co/5MeXFlyzEO>

— Brian Berletic (@BrianJBerletic) [April 19, 2023](#)

There's also the brazen hypocrisy of it all. The US government is *constantly* engaging in foreign influence operations with outfits like [the National Endowment for Democracy](#), which was set up to help foment coups and color revolutions and advance US information interests overtly in ways the CIA used to do covertly.

As commentator Brian Berletic [noted](#) on Twitter,

"The US through the National Endowment for Democracy has created armies of organizations carrying out malign influence operations around the world including here in Thailand. When the Thai government attempts to stop this activity, the US embassy shouts 'free speech.' Thailand's government and others around the world could easily cite this move by the US Justice Department to target and uproot US-funded organizations doing exactly this and worse."

So for the US government to now claim it's legitimate to start throwing US citizens in prison for a decade because they published "propaganda" for another country is absurd, and more than a little scary. The most powerful government in the world needs *more* political dissent at home, not less, and here they are trying to turn it into a crime.

When they claim the members of the APSP published "propaganda" and promoted "dissention", what they really mean is that they engaged in speech and political activism that the US government does not like. The spinmeisters will try to spin it, the legal mumbo-jumbo will try to obfuscate it, but that's what's happening. Don't let them conceal this from you. They're not worried about Russian propaganda, they're worried you'll stop listening to US propaganda.

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