Defending Rights & Dissent’s

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

Making

Necessary Trouble

for 60 Years
Dear Fellow Troublemakers,

In spite of tremendous obstacles, including a global pandemic and an unrelenting assault on civil liberties from the executive branch and legislators alike, Defending Rights & Dissent made great strides toward our goal of making the promise of the Bill of Rights a reality this year.

We effectively killed Section 215, one of the most egregious surveillance provisions of the PATRIOT Act. Working with a strong coalition of national groups, and thousands of grassroots activists, we not only forced Section 215 to sunset, we’re forcing Congress to reckon with the vast -- and unconstitutional -- surveillance state they have constructed over the past two decades. Our decade-long effort to end the use of the Espionage Act as a weapon against whistleblowers and journalists has begun to bear fruit. Our bill, The Protect Brave Whistleblowers Act, was introduced in the House just this past month.

Our advocacy against the dangerous “Countering Violent Extremism” program and other war on terror policies that alienate and criminalize the Muslim community was rewarded this year when President-elect Biden promised to discontinue CVE and related programs, and vowed to end the Muslim Ban on “day one”. We look forward to your continuing advocacy and support as we work to ensure that the Biden administration both fulfills these promises, and rolls back various rights-infringing policies and programs.

In 2020, we built significant momentum, having found effective ways to connect with new audiences and constituencies via an array of new outreach efforts and online events. 2021 provides an opportunity to capitalize on this renewed energy, and we very much look forward to bolstering our vanguard actions in the battle to defend human rights and bolster civil liberties.

Stay Loud, Stay Strong,

Sue Udry
Executive Director

Sascha Meinrath
Board President
Defending Rights & Dissent provides critical support to protesters. We successfully fought anti-protest and anti-free speech bills in state legislatures across the county this year. And, just two days after the murder of George Floyd, we broadcast a special webinar, "How to Safely Protest During a Pandemic," offering timely advice and creative tips for protesters. As thousands of people who had never before joined a protest took to the streets to protest police violence, we continued to offer support and guidance, building ProtectMyProtest.org.

DRAD helped defeat anti-free speech bills in Wisconsin, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, and Louisiana by working with state coalitions, and mobilizing supporters against those bills. In Washington, DC, the DRAD office serves as the legal support hub for large and/or high visibility protests.

In New York, DRAD filed an amicus brief to support the rights of students at Fordham University to organize a chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine.

The most high profile crackdowns on dissent occurred over the summer with sometimes brutal police response to protests against police brutality and calls for accountability.
Throughout our 60 year history, we’ve organized and advocated for police accountability and criminal justice reform.

Our work has included opposition to tough on crime legislation nationally, and promoting model local legislation to prohibit racial profiling and protect freedom of assembly from over policing. In 2020 this work again took center stage.

Once again in 2020, we forged coalitions, mobilized the grassroots, raised awareness, lobbied Congress, and pressured the Department of Justice on a host of accountability issues. Some of that work is reflected in the editorials and blog posts we produced through the year on the Dissent Newswire.

The Dissent Newswire on Police Accountability in 2020

- **DRAD Stands With Those Fighting for Justice for George Floyd, Condemns Trump’s Outrageous Calls For Shooting Americans**
- **8 Immediate Steps Congress Must Take to Begin to Address Police Violence & Racism**
- **DRAD Condemns Nationwide Violence Against Anti-Police Brutality Protests**
- **Killology, BulletProof, and Warrior Policing** by Suraj K Sazawal
- **Race, Violence, and Political Illegitimacy** by Patrick Eddington
- **DRAD and Over 100 Orgs Demand #ProtectBlackDissent**
- **Over 50 Civil Society Groups Condemn Unidentified Federal Officers in Portland**
- **Over 40 Groups Declare Intimidation Tactics in Louisiana Won’t Silence Environmental Protesters**

Read more at RightsandDissent.org/Newswire
In addition to our published written content on police accountability, we also hosted numerous events on the topic this year. And our flagship #LunchTimeLive series devoted several episodes to police accountability and criminal justice issues.

**Lunchtime Live: Exposing Bad Cops**
feat. Ryan Shapiro & Jeffrey Light
June 30, 2020

[Click to Watch](#)

**Lunchtime Live: America’s Most Corrupt Police Squad**
feat. Baynard Woods & Brandon Soderberg
August 27, 2020

[Click to Watch](#)

We also hosted three events in 2020 highlighting the U.S. detention system & its conditions during the pandemic.

**Public Events**

**MAY**

**Bullying Democracy**
*A Conversation with Dave Lindorff*

**SEPTEMBER**

**What’s Happening in ICE Detention?**
Feat. Azadeh Shahshahani

**OCTOBER**

**Abolition From Within**

[Watch more at RightsandDissent.org/Videos](#)
The Enduring Problem of FBI First Amendment Abuse

Our groundbreaking report on FBI First Amendment abuse and attempts to reform the FBI provides the foundation for much of our education and advocacy work.

This report, written by DRAD policy director Chip Gibbons, is a meticulously documented accounting of what we know about FBI political surveillance over the past century.

While released at the end of 2019, throughout 2020 we have continued to amplify the findings of the report through new & innovative engagement strategies.
THE STILL SPYING PODCAST

Over 3,000 people have downloaded this limited series podcast. Episodes are debuting with around 150 downloads within the first 24 hours. Many of these downloads come before any promotions - indicating a strong following.

Episodes:
- Legacy of Abuse: From The Palmer Raids to Black Identity Extremism with Mike German
- What Powers Does the FBI Have & How Do We Rein Them In? with Emily Berman
- Is All Policing Political? with Alex Vitale (clip on the left)
- The War on Black Dissent Part I: Black Lives, Red Scares with Gerald Horne
- The War on Black Dissent, Part II: COINTELPRO & The Assassination of Fred Hampton with Jeffrey Haas
- The War on Black Dissent Part III--The FBI v. The Movement for Black Lives with Malkia Devich-Cyril
- Exposing FBI Surveillance Today with Alice Speri
- The FBI Man Inside the Klan with Mary Stanton
- The FBI vs. The Young Lords with Johanna Fernandez

They’ve murdered the Chairman. There was a police raid this morning and they’ve murdered the Chairman, Fred Hampton.

Jeffrey Haas described the moment he learned his client, Fred Hampton, had been killed by Chicago PD in Episode 5 of the Still Spying Podcast.

We also held a series of in-person (pre-COVID) and online events to further amplify the report.

January
- DC community event co-sponsored with Institute for Policy Studies

April
- Inside the FBI’s Spying on the International Solidarity Movement (online) co-sponsored by Palestine Legal

July
- WTF is JTTF? A teach-in on FBI Joint Terrorism Task Forces (online) co-sponsored with Justice for Muslims Collective, MPower Change, and Asian Americans Advancing Justice.

September
- Still Spying Podcast presents Folk Singers & the FBI featuring Aaron J. Leonard (pictured)

Section 215 has been used to allow the government to collect without a warrant the call detail records of virtually every phone call in the United States, and other business records (we still don’t know the extent of how the provision has been used by the FBI).

Section 215 was due to sunset at the end of 2019, and although it was extended briefly, we managed to defeat efforts to renew the law in March, and surveillance hawks have not succeeded in getting it renewed yet. The provision is effectively dead!

Section 215 was a top priority for direct lobbying

- With coalition partners, DRAD sent a series of letters explaining the constitutional problems with Section 215, and arguing for either strong reforms or sunset.

- DRAD staff met with members of Congress and their staff to educate them on the problems with Section 215 & encourage them to vote against renewal.

Section 215 was a top priority for grassroots mobilization

- DRAD generated thousands of emails and phone calls to Congress over 6 months, and hosted a #LunchTimeLive event on Facebook to raise awareness of the congressional debate over surveillance.
WHISTLEBLOWERS
ON THE FRONTLINES OF DISSENT

Defending Rights & Dissent has been a leader in advocating for reform and raising public awareness around the dangers of using the Espionage Act to prosecute whistleblowers. We've led the call for pardoning Edward Snowden and Julian Assange.

We scored a major victory when a bill we helped craft, the Brave Whistleblower Protection Act was introduced in Congress this year. This initial introduction smoothes the way to get the bill re-introduced early in 2021.

Public Events

AUGUST

The Case for a Snowden Pardon
with Glenn Greenwald

Pardon Snowden!
with William Neuheisel & Dr. Thomas Drake

SEPTEMBER

Assange Extradition & the War on Journalism
with Daniel Ellsberg, James Goodale & Chris Hedges

OCTOBER

The Extradition of Assange & the Future of Global Press Freedom
with Daniel Ellsberg & Kevin Gosztola (April 2020)

Assange Extradition Update
with Kevin Gosztola

The Extradition of Assange & the Future of Global Press Freedom
with Daniel Ellsberg & Kevin Gosztola (April 2020)
As the coronavirus spread in the spring, some state and local governments implemented, or considered implementing stay at home orders without due consideration to protecting the civil rights and civil liberties of residents.

Our primary initial concern was to prevent adoption of measures that would lead to more over policing of minority communities, and plans to increase surveillance. Working with community groups in Washington, DC, we outlined for the Mayor some principles to consider before implementing a stay at home order. Throughout the year, we monitored the use of surveillance tools to track the coronavirus.

DRAD also advocated for the release of people held in ICE detention, and compassionate release of prisoners and reductions of pre-trial detention and mobilized our grassroots around this issue.

Public Events

**APRIL**

Civil Liberties & Coronavirus Townhall
Pat Eddington, Azadeh Shahshahani, Ken Klippenstein, Alex Vitale & Sarah Lazare

**MAY**

Organizing Socially Responsible Protests
NeeNee Taylor, Chinyere Tutashinda & Tyler Crawford

**AUGUST**

“We’re Dying In Here” A Virtual Town Hall
Alanah Odoms, Taryn Merkl, Rev. Alexis Anderson
WHO WE ARE
OUR STAFF

Sue Udry
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Sue Udry’s career in public service spans four decades and includes advocating for peace, civil rights, and economic justice. She is an experienced non-profit administrator and expert on issues related to the intersection of national security, human rights, and civil society.

As Executive Director of Defending Rights & Dissent, Udry leads the organization’s advocacy and public education efforts to protect and strengthen civil society and challenge government abuse of First and Fourth Amendment rights. She represents DRAD in the media, in numerous coalitions, and on several boards of directors.

Prior to coming to DRAD, Udry was the legislative coordinator for United for Peace and Justice, a coalition of over 1,600 groups working to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While living in Chicago, Udry served as the Executive Director of the Chicago Committee to Defend the Bill of Rights, and as an organizer for the Coalition for New Priorities, and organized child care workers for the Day Care Action Council of Illinois. She currently serves on the board of the National Coalition to Protect Student Privacy, and the DC chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, and the DC-NLG Litigation Fund, as well as the Advisory Board of the Charity and Security Network. She is a co-founder of the Montgomery County Civil Rights Coalition.

Chip Gibbons
LEGAL & POLICY DIRECTOR
Chip Gibbons is an expert on US Constitutional law, a journalist, and a longtime activist. He joined Defending Rights & Dissent as a Legal Fellow in 2015, after having led a successful campaign to defeat a proposed unconstitutional anti-boycott bill in Maryland. Chip has advised both state and federal lawmakers on the First Amendment implications of pending legislation. He’s also appeared on Al Jazeera as an expert on U.S. Constitutional law.

As a journalist, Chip writes about civil liberties and social movements, both from a historical and a contemporary perspective. His work has been published in The Nation and Jacobin, and he contributed a chapter to The Henry Kissinger Files (forthcoming, Verso Books). Even before joining Defending Rights & Dissent staff, Chip was an early contributor to the Dissent NewsWire. He continues to bring his journalistic talents to Defending Rights & Dissent, where he has done first hand reporting on the unprecedented prosecution of Trump Inauguration protesters and was instrumental in drafting our groundbreaking, first of its kind report on ag-gag laws. He has a far-reaching breadth of knowledge, covering everything from the applicability of the unconstitutional conditions doctrine to state anti-boycotts laws to the history of FBI political surveillance.

Mehdi Rahmati
ADMINISTRATOR
Mehdi Rahmati is a human rights advocate and technology enthusiast with several years of experience working for international human rights organizations in various capacities. Prior to joining Defending Rights and Dissent team, for several years Mehdi worked at the Committee to Protect Journalists as Office and IT Manager, Communications Associate and later on as Social Media Associate. Mehdi’s has deep interest in non-profit technology, systems security and streamlining processes.
Quentin Anthony Anderson is an accomplished nonprofit communications and social justice advocacy professional. Prior to arriving at DRAD, Quentin served as Executive Chairman of The Justice Alliance, a Louisiana-based nonprofit that organizes the state’s largest annual social justice conference. Quentin also served as Communications Director for the Industrial Areas Foundation-affiliated Southern Institute for Public Life, as well as Associate Director for Public Affairs & Communications for DC-based clean energy nonprofit Groundswell.

In 2015, he led a successful school-to-prison pipeline advocacy campaign in Illinois that resulted in passage of the nation’s most comprehensive school discipline reform legislation – a campaign that was later profiled by NPR. He has also worked for organizations such as NextGen Climate Action, United Way, and Obama for America.

**OUR BOARD**

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**INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT**

*Defending Rights & Dissent thanks the hundreds of grassroots supporters who made financial contributions in 2020, and these foundations:*

- CS Fund & Warsh • Mott Legacy
- Jackson Social Welfare Fund/First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor
- Piper Fund, a Proteus Fund initiative,
- Stewart R. Mott Charitable Trust
- Tikva Grassroots Empowerment Fund/Tides Foundation
On July 17th, we lost two long time board members: The Reverend C.T. Vivian & Georgia Congressman John Lewis.

Both were champions of civil rights and civil liberties. We were honored that they chose to serve on our Board, and indebted to them for their leadership and vision.

May they rest in power and may their legacies continue to inspire our work.