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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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01.03.2024

## ***Long live freedom (of speech), dammit!***

It is about sowing fake news, planting suspicion, which is immediately amplified and viralized by companies dedicated to the distortion of democracy, such as trollcenters



Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, there are governments and people, even in positions of power around the world, who threaten this right, from the United Kingdom, through the United States and reaching the south, to the Argentina of the Millennium.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought and expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, either orally, in writing, or through new

information technologies, a right that cannot be subject to prior censorship but to subsequent responsibilities expressly established by law.

It has been 44 years since UNESCO, meeting in Belgrade (capital of the then Yugoslavia) disseminated the so-called McBride Report, also known as "Multiple Voices, One World", which advocated the democratization of information, after analyzing the inequality in communication in the world, and suggesting a new communicational order to solve these problems and promote peace and human development.



#### McBride Report

The report focused on the defence and protection of journalists who, because of their work, are often annoying to governments, politicians and their economic interests, especially those working in investigative journalism and war reporters.

But the rebellious media and the journalists and researchers know that our governments never read the McBride report, and the journalists and the press continue to perish. Since the leaks about the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq almost fourteen years ago, Julian Assange, founder of Wikileaks, has been the victim of a continuous smear and smear campaign.

He was detained several times in maximum security prisons in the United Kingdom and received asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, locked in two rooms without being

able to leave from June 2012 until April 2019, when he was finally re-arrested after losing his consular protection. Today, the world is expectant about the UK's decision to extradite him to the United States, where a death sentence surely awaits him.

The U.S. has been the only country in the world to take legal reprisals against the information disseminated by WikiLeaks, accusing its founder of committing 18 crimes related to espionage and computer crimes. For the alleged commission of these crimes, Assange is threatened with 175 years in prison.

In 2022, the newspapers The Guardian, The New York Times, Le Monde, El País and Der Spiegel signed an open letter – "Publishing is not a crime" – to the US government asking it to stop Assange's extradition.



To stand against Assange's extradition is to defend freedom of expression, press and information. Because this case is a clear attempt to criminalize and intimidate journalists or media outlets that dare to denounce the crimes of power. We cannot forget that in recent months more than sixty-five journalists have been killed in Gaza at the hands of Israel.

Nor can we forget that 780 journalists have been imprisoned around the world, and that the Spaniard Pablo González has been in pre-trial detention for two years in Poland, a member country of the European Union, without any evidence or accusation having yet been presented against him.

#### The Dirty War Against Mexico

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador demanded an apology from the U.S. government of Joe Biden, after the dissemination of press versions about an alleged delivery of drug trafficking resources to the 2006 electoral campaign of the now Mexican president.

The White House and the U.S. Department of Justice assured that there is no investigation into President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, referring to a piece of propaganda and political destabilization disguised as a report by *The New York Times* on the alleged financing of drug trafficking to collaborators of the president in his 2018 election campaign.

What it is about is sowing fake news, planting suspicion, which is immediately amplified and viralized by companies dedicated to the distortion of democracy, such as *trollcenters*. López Obrador called *The New York Times* a "filthy shambles" for the "denunciation." "It's a shame, there's no doubt that this type of journalism is in decline," he said.

A month earlier, another "report" of a similar nature had been published, signed by Tim Golden, winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, in the media *ProPublica*, which quickly fell into disrepute due to its lack of credibility and lack of sources.

#### The Trolls of the Millennium

In Argentina, a complete electronic machine surrounds the far-right president Javier Milei, through which his figure is promoted and exalted, criticizes, insults and defenestrates his adversaries, and harasses and threatens his critics.

Juan Pablo Carreira (Juan Doe in the networks), is the new Director of Digital Communication of the Mileinato, He is a person known in networks for his aggressive libertarian and ultra-right profile. The fish by the mouth dies: "If one day I receive *a peso* from the State, let them hang me upside down in Congress," he wrote in 2015 on Twitter.

During the previous government, the National Directorate of Cybersecurity explained to citizens that botnets are a series or network of computer devices capable of connecting to the Internet that perform jointly programmed tasks, not always for lawful purposes, that is, they are malicious. These are assembled without the knowledge that several devices (computers, cell phones, tablets, etc.) are part of them, they are controlled remotely and work autonomously and automatically.

Its name comes from "bot," an acronym for computer robot, and "net," and was first used in 2001 in EarthLink Inc.'s lawsuit against Khan C. Smith. Back in 2013, a researcher from the corporate security company Proofpoint detected a botnet that included smart TVs, refrigerators and other "smart" appliances, which came to be known as the Internet of Things.

Today, this electronic machinery of the Millennium includes militant tweeters and mercenaries, "influencers", troll and bot farms, and anonymous operators who take care of the dirty tasks, such as launching smear campaigns, making phone calls or sending e-mails, from the impunity of the shadows, to suggest that he shut the mouths of whoever is necessary. It also controls "farms" with thousands of trolls, bot accounts and other digital tools that it put at Milei's service.



Fernando Cerimedo, digital political consultant at Milei and founder of Grupo Numen

The conservative newspaper La Nación points out that another indication of digital manipulation through bots and trolls is that Milei's messages on Twitter, for example, show an inexplicable disparity in the number of "likes" and "retweets" received by the messages he sends within minutes of each other, with the interactions of some tweets being around tens of thousands and the immediate aftermath are almost nil.

Another indication of the presence of the defamatory and advertising machinery is the very high level of interference of accounts without photographs of users, or with fancy names followed by several numbers or that are exclusively dedicated to retweeting and indicating "likes", without generating their own content.

"Bot" accounts usually spend three or more dormant months from the time they are activated, in a sort of lethargy or hibernation, before starting to disseminate multimedia material, because their creators detected that the algorithms of social networks – Twitter, in particular – can block them automatically, says La Nación, which refrains from presenting specific examples to avoid the promotion of those same accounts.

In just two months, the government of the far-right Milei decided to suspend limits on the concentration of media ownership at the national level, to intervene in the public media

system and promise its privatization, to intervene in the enforcement authority of the laws governing the sector by excluding parliamentary minorities from decisions.



Organizations that bring together community and self-managed media, social communication and journalism careers, press workers and human rights organizations asked the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to warn about the non-compliance with freedom of expression standards in Argentina, denouncing more media concentration and less freedom of expression.

The government announced the privatization of all state communication and information organs (the Telam agency, the television channel, the national radio, among others), as well as the closure of the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism. Milei himself promoted on social networks the celebration of the closure of a body aimed at putting limits on attacks on the human rights of minorities, to which libertarians are so fond.

In just two months, the Mileinato also decided to ruthlessly repress press workers who try to cover the demonstrations against austerity and the dismantling of the state.

The conviction that the state should not put limits on the private sector is leading the government to dismantle a media system organized into three sectors: the private-commercial, the non-profit civil society-managed and the state/public. A system that was built after decades in which only the owners of private media had conditions to carry out their activity, according to the Center for Legal and Social Studies.



### The Limits of Freedom of Expression and the Apology of Hate

In addition to what has already been done, through the Decree of Necessity and Urgency (DNU) and the intervention decrees, the government – and also the neoliberal and far-right political groups that support it – are constantly threatening to eliminate valuable policies that promote community rights. All of this is complemented by verbal and physical violence against press workers, and the persistent attacks by the president and his officials on journalists.

Milei came to the Argentine presidency to the cry of "Long live freedom, dammit! Today I dare to add to you: Long live freedom of expression, dammit!"

*Aram Aharonian*

*Source: [Latin American Center for Strategic Analysis](#) (CLAE), February 25, 2024*

*Edited by [Maria Piedad Ossaba](#)*

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La Pluma. net 29.02.2024