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Lawyers, Activists Investigated for Iraq War Protest

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Sporadic news reports since the U.S. invaded Iraq in the Spring of 2003 have revealed that the Bush Administration is conducting surveillance on anti-war protestors. Except for the man in South Carolina who was prosecuted for displaying an anti-war placard within a "restricted area" (meaning where Bush could see it) at a Columbia, S.C. airport, no one has been charged with a crime for protesting.

But that may change. Federal prosecutors in Des Moines, Iowa are casting a wide net in issuing subpoenas to individuals who attended an anti-war rally sponsored by the National Lawyer's Guild at Drake University. As goes the Justice Department these days, a veil of secrecy has dropped down over the investigations. People subpoenaed have been ordered not to talk about the investigation.

The National Lawyer's Guild is made up of attorneys who respect and defend the Constitution and fight for individual rights in civil and criminal cases. I have written much about John Ashcroft's war on defense attorneys, particularly in the context of the prosecution of attorney Lynne Stewart (see links on this page) and the erosion of attorney-client confidentiality by DOJ listening in on attorney-client meetings in federal prisons.

By attacking a peace rally sponsored by a legal organization, Ashcroft is letting fly a one-two punch--lawyers who are also anti-war may be in particular jeopardy. But of doing what? Since when is First Amendment expression a crime? When you call it "terrorism," that's when. The investigation is headed by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force.

The timing of the investigation may be a not-so-subtle warning to those planning to participate in the March 20, 2004 anti-war rallies. Those who do protest better be prepared to pay with their freedom. Democratic presidential wannabe's and private citizens--are you paying attention?