

‘More Intimidation Than Crime-Busting’ Says IFJ As Police Target Independent Media Network

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the global organisation representing over 500,000 journalists worldwide, today called for an investigation into the action by police in Britain in co-operation with other agencies that led to the temporary closure of 21 of the more than 140 Indymedia web sites worldwide.

"We have witnessed an intolerable and intrusive international police operation against a network specialising in independent journalism," said Aidan White IFJ General Secretary. "The way this has been done smacks more of intimidation of legitimate journalistic inquiry than crime-busting."

The IFJ believes that the authorities may have abused their powers in carrying out the action, which is said to have been carried out at the request of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States.

Yesterday police seized two web server computers in London used by the Indymedia network. The servers were located on the premises of the Rackspace company, which is now not giving out any information.

Initial reports suggested FBI officers themselves had seized the servers. The seizure follows visits by the FBI to Indymedia personnel in the US inquiring about the publication on the French site Indymedia Nantes of photographs of Swiss undercover police photographing protestors. The photographs remain available on other websites.

Indymedia sites, which provide challenging and independent reporting, particularly of political and social justice issues, are open forums where any member of the public can publish their comments.

The IFJ believes the seizure may be linked to a September 30 court case in San Jose California, in which Indymedia San Francisco and two students at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania successfully opposed an application by Diebold Election Systems Inc to remove documents claiming to reveal flaws in the design of electronic voting machines which are due to be used widely in the forthcoming US Presidential election.

Although Indymedia UK was back in operation within hours, several of the other 20 sites affected remain silenced today.

"The seizing of computers and the high profile nature of this incident suggests that someone wanted to stifle these independent voices in journalism," said Aidan White. "We need a full investigation into why this action took place, who took part and who authorised it."