

# Censorship as an Investment: Turn Two Cents Into \$311,562!

Writing at Antiwar.com, Natylie Baldwin reports on letters sent in October by the US Treasury Department to American writers Daniel Lazare and Michael Averko, threatening fines of up to “\$311,562 or twice the value of the underlying transaction.”

The “underlying transaction” in question? Getting paid to write for a publication the US government disapproves of: The Strategic Culture Foundation, a Russian think tank sanctioned by the Treasury Department because it’s regarded as an arm of the Russian state.

Yes, you read that right: Putting in one’s two cents on current affairs (the SCF’s focus) can yield a profit of more than 1.5 million percent!

Unfortunately, that investment return runs in the wrong direction — out of the writer’s portfolio and into the US Treasury.

Although I’ve run across the Strategic Culture Foundation’s articles here and there, and recognize the names of some of the authors whose work appears on its site, I can’t claim any great familiarity with its editorial line or funding sources. For all I know, it really IS a Russian state medium associated with that regime’s intelligence service and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In other words, SCF may be the equivalent of the US government’s Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio y Television Marti, Center for Strategic and International Studies, et al.

If so, well ... so what?

The First Amendment’s freedom of speech and press clauses make no exceptions for speech or writing published in foreign media, or speech or writing for which the writers or speakers are paid. Nor, the US not being at war with Russia, is there any question of, say, treason (“adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort”) involved.

Last time I checked, the US Constitution, as “Supreme Law of the Land,” outweighed Executive Order 13848, under which the Treasury Department issued its threats against Lazare and Averko.

Writing for a foreign publication, even a state-funded or -operated publication, even for money, is not a crime.

Threatening writers for doing so is a crime in both the legal and moral sense.

Since 2002, the United States has fallen from 17th place to 44th place on the Reporters Without Borders global press freedom index. Need we wonder why?

US president Joe Biden says that “a free press is essential to the health of democracy.” If he means it, he’ll forbid future use of his predecessor’s Executive Order 13848 to impose censorship under threat of financial punishment.