

Be furious — but not at the messengers

SO, YOU'RE livid. You read about the suspected drug dealer who was freed in the aftermath of this newspaper's "Tainted Justice" series, and you're outraged.

The expose, written by *Daily News* reporters Barbara Laker and Wendy Ruderman, revealed that a Philadelphia narcotics cop allegedly falsified evidence to get search warrants for suspected drug

houses. The first prosecution to fall apart after the stories were published involved Thomas Cooper, a crack dealer facing life in prison who was let loose last week.

Yes, society was this close to being spared the further ravages of a predator convicted of selling crack across the street from

a school. Instead, the prosecution dropped the charges because the evidence that justified the search warrant was deemed suspicious.

Judging by the response to the story, many of you blame . . . reporters Laker and Ruderman.

"You f----- piece of s---!" one reader wrote to Laker in an e-mail. "You are a disgrace to yourself and your family and this city!"

"It's a shame that you have an ability to get the word out about the positives of this police department . . . and this is how you earn your money."

"I am disgusted by your article," another reader e-mailed Laker.

"The timing of its publication was obviously planned to coincide with the last cop killing to lessen the severity of its impact. It's people like you who are to blame for the unprecedented violence against the Philadelphia Police."

Laker and Ruderman are also being savaged on a police Web site and are being wished all manner of misfortune, including death, by furious readers.

I'm furious, too.

But not at Laker and Ruderman, for god's sake.

I'm furious that a two-time convicted drug dealer walked free because a police officer allegedly abused his power and failed to make a legitimate case.

I'm furious that one police officer could generate suspicion and disrespect for law enforcement and tarnish the honorable work of his colleagues.

I'm furious that so many people apparently think that "breaking the law to enforce it," as one of my colleagues put it, is acceptable.

It might help to remember that Laker and Ruderman didn't set Cooper free.

Charges were dropped by a federal prosecutor "in the interests of justice," and the case was dismissed by a federal judge.

That drastic outcome gives credence to the reporting done by the *Daily News*.

A cache of drugs worth roughly \$15,000 was found in Cooper's house during the raid — crack and marijuana and cocaine, according to reports.

But that doesn't justify a falsi-

fied search warrant.

It just makes matters worse, knowing that straightforward police work might have nailed this guy.

Instead, he went free.

And who knows how many other defendants will escape prosecution because of shoddy and shameful shortcuts, allegedly perpetrated by an officer of the law?

A federal and local task force is investigating allegations against Officer Jeffrey Cujdik. Hundreds of criminal cases potentially are at stake.

The act of falsifying a search warrant ought to send chills down your spine, because it leaves all of us vulnerable to being falsely accused.

I know that "violating rights" is considered by some to be a supercilious left-wing concern, that any means is deemed justified so long as the bad guys get nabbed — be they drug dealers or suspected terrorists.

But once the rules are bent in pursuit of a criminal, then — sorry to lecture — none of us is safe.

If power can be abused in pursuit of a "good" outcome then it can be abused for any reason whatsoever. And then we're cap-

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JILL PORTER

MUNICIPAL PRIMARY ELECTION NOTICE

AVISO DE LA ELECCION PRIMARIA MUNICIPAL

A MUNICIPAL PRIMARY ELECTION WILL BE HELD ON

UNA ELECCION PRIMARIA MUNICIPAL TENDRA LUGAR EL

TUESDAY, MAY 19, 2009

MARTES, 19 DE MAYO DEL 2009

BETWEEN THE HOURS OF 7:00 A.M. and 8:00 P.M. IN ALL ELECTION DISTRICTS OR DIVISIONS IN THE CITY AND COUNTY OF PHILADELPHIA STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

ENTRE LAS 7:00 A.M. Y 8:00 P.M. EN TODOS LOS DISTRITOS DE ELECCION O DIVISIONES EN LA CIUDAD Y LAS CONDADO DE FILADELFIA, ESTADO DE PENSILVANIA

Voters will nominate candidates for the following offices:

LOS VOTANTES NOMINARAN A LOS CANDIDATOS PARA LOS SIGUIENTES PUESTOS:

- One Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
 - Un Magistrado para la Corte Superma De Pensilvania
- Three Judges of the Superior Court of Pennsylvania
 - Tres Jueces para la Corte Superior De Pensilvania
- Two Judges of the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania
 - Dos Jueces para la Corte del Estado De Pensilvania
- Seven Judges of the Court of Common Pleas of the City and County of Philadelphia
 - Siete Jueces para la Corte de Primera Instancia de la Ciudad y Condado de Filadelfia
- Four Judges of the Municipal Court of the City and County of Philadelphia
 - Quatro Jueces para la Corte Municipal de la Ciudad y Condado de Filadelfia
- One District Attorney of the City and County of Philadelphia
 - Un Fiscal para la Ciudad y Condado de Filadelfia
- One City Controller of the City and County of Philadelphia
 - Un Contralor para la Ciudad y Condado de Filadelfia

ONE JUDGE AND ONE INSPECTOR OF ELECTION MAY BE NOMINATED BY EACH POLITICAL PARTY IN EVERY VOTING DIVISION IN PHILADELPHIA

UN JUEZ Y UN INSPECTOR DE ELECCIONES PODRA SER NOMINADO POR CADA PARTIDO POLITICO EN CADA DIVISION DE VOTACION EN FILADELFIA

The following Political Parties are eligible to nominate candidates in Philadelphia at the Municipal Primary Election to be held on Tuesday, May 19, 2009.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY REPUBLICAN PARTY

Los siguientes Partidos Politicos son elegibles para nominar candidatos en Filadelfia en la Eleccion Primaria Municipal que tendra lugar el martes, 19 de Mayo del 2009.

PARTIDO DEMOCRATA PARTIDO REPUBLICANO

CANDIDATES TAKE NOTICE • LOS CANDIDATOS QUEDAN ADVERTIDOS

Nomination Petitions for District Attorney, City Controllor, Judge and Inspector of Elections for the May 19, 2009 Primary Election must be filed in Room 142, City Hall, by 5:00 pm. Tuesday, March 10, 2009
Las peticiones de nominacion para Fiscal, Controlador Municipal Juez Inspector de Elecciones para la Eleccion Primaria del 19 de Mayo del 2009 de ban de sometidas en el Salon 142 de la Alcaldia, a mas tardas a las 5:00 pm. del Martes, al 10 de Marzo del 2009.
Nominations Petitions for all other offices for the May 19, 2009 Primary Election must be filed by 5:00 pm, March 10, 2009 in Room 210. North Office Building, Harrisburg, PA.
Las peticiones de nominacion para todos los otros puetos para la Eleccion Primaria del 19 Mayo del 2009 de ban de ser sometidas a mas tarder a las 5:00 pm al 10 de Marzo del 2009, en el Salon 210, North Office Building, Harrisburg, PA

PHILADELPHIA COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS JUNTA DE ELECCIONES DEL CONDADO DE PHILADELPHIA

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Chairwoman, City Commissioners
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ANTHONY CLARK
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Comisionado Municipal

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City Commissioner
Comisionado Municipal

BILL RUBIN
Acting Supervisor of Elections
Supervisor de Elecciones Ejercicio

PORTER

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tives of a capricious and arbitrary system instead of an institution of laws.

The work of Laker and Ruderman is particularly noteworthy at this moment, when the company that owns this newspaper has filed for bankruptcy and our future is uncertain.

"Tainted Justice" nobly champions the rights of victims who may be unpopular and unlikely but who deserve the protection of the law nonetheless.

Without newspapers, who will be the watchdogs? Who will perform this urgent function?

You may be furious that a suspected drug dealer was freed — as well you should be.

But don't aim your fury at Laker and Ruderman. ★

E-mail porterj@phillynews.com or call 215-854-5850. For recent columns: <http://go.philly.com/porter>

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