

Montreal Internet service provider raided by FBI

Mike Ingram
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In the wake of a series of attacks blocking access to some of the largest and best known Internet web sites, the US government is seeking to use popular concern over the denial of services to push through new legislation that could affect the democratic rights of millions.

Confirming fears that the attacks upon Yahoo, eBay and other prominent web sites would provide a pretext for the further erosion of Internet freedom, Look Communications, a Montreal Internet service provider (ISP), was raided by officers of the FBI and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police late on Tuesday, February 15.

The raid was part of a massive security investigation that involves FBI field officers in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta, Boston and Seattle. They have been joined by seven other domestic offices, FBI personnel abroad and police agencies in Germany, Canada and other countries.

US Attorney General Janet Reno appeared at a press conference with six other officials Wednesday February 16 to highlight what she referred to as "a growing threat from computer intruders." In a spending plan for fiscal year 2001, President Bill Clinton is calling for a \$37 million increase to fight Internet crime. Much of the increase is expected to go to the FBI-led Infrastructure Protection Centre, which is co-ordinating the search for the perpetrators of the recent attacks.

New law-and-order measures are being introduced in Congress in the name of fighting computer crime. A bill drafted by Democratic Senator Charles Schumer would make it easier to track hackers (as well as legitimate Internet users) across state lines and lower the age of prosecution to 15. Fellow Democrat, Senator Patrick Leahy proposed to set up a \$25 million federal grant program which could be used by states for the

training of law enforcement officials and to prosecute computer crimes.

Underlining the bipartisan agreement on this issue, Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson drew up a bill that would double the penalties for criminal hacking from five years to ten years for the first offence, and from ten years to twenty years for the second offence.

An Internet poll showed widespread anxiety among home computer users in the aftermath of the attacks. More than half of US online consumers will think twice before sharing credit card data over the Internet, according to the poll carried out by *PC Data Online*. But while 90 percent of home computer users surveyed expressed concern, less than a third said they believed the government should take the lead in policing the web.

Civil liberties groups have opposed key parts of a Clinton proposal to bolster network protection as an undue expansion of surveillance over communication. Critics have been particularly opposed to a proposed Federal Intrusion Detection network, FIDNet, that the government says would act as a "burglar alarm" in the event of a network penetration.

According to the Electronic Privacy Information Centre, the FIDNet would violate "the spirit of the federal wiretap statute, the plain language of the federal Privacy Act and the history of the Fourth Amendment". These provisions outlaw unreasonable searches, Marc Rotenburg, executive director of Electronic Privacy Information Centre, told Congress last month.

FBI investigators and those working with them have already monitored thousands of conversations from an online chat system known as Internet Relay Chat (IRC). The IRC messages were recorded by security experts at Stanford University and at Kroll-O'Gara, a computer

consulting firm. The conversations have led investigators to search for three hackers who go by the names of Mafiaboy, Nachoman and Coolio.

It was in connection with the first of these that the Montreal ISP was raided. It is believed that Look Communications was asked to hand over confidential customer account data and Internet usage statistics of a particular customer who used Mafiaboy as a user name. The company said that person hadn't been a customer since 1998, but on the advice of its lawyers, the firm concluded it had no choice but to comply immediately with the FBI request, without notifying its former customer.



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