

Letters from our readers

14 July 2011

On “*Former top aide to British prime minister arrested in Murdoch hacking scandal*”

After reading Julie Hyland’s insightful article, the thought that was thrown up is how widespread is this invasion of privacy? I had a look at what some of the newspapers were saying. My thoughts were the commercial newspapers are covering up the full scope and extent for damage control.

Although in the main there was an enormous magnitude of phone hacking, there were also computer hacking and burglary as well as bugging bedrooms. The archive that was on its journey to destroy evidence was said to contain half a terabyte of data—equivalent to 500 editions of an encyclopedia. The *Guardian* newspaper estimated that amount to be the equivalent of a million emails. I think 500 encyclopedias would easily overtake that amount. Even so, that means they were spying on an enormous number of people over a considerable period. Here too, this is only what they kept as an archive, obviously discarding useless emails and recordings. Moreover, this archive only dates back to 2005 but they were at it well before that date. On top of this the other newspapers in Fleet Street were at it; sources say this is how business in Fleet Street is done—“it’s just business.”

“The *Guardian* newspaper has identified a total of eleven specialist ‘bidders’ who were paid by wealthy clients, including Fleet Street newspapers, to steal medical records, bank statements, itemised phone bills, tax files and anything else that was both confidential and newsworthy.” The information too may have been used for leveraging favors or blackmail. So on top of this million-plus emails, the other commercial newspapers in Fleet Street were in the thick of it.

One of the main hackers hired, a specialist in selling the dirt, was Jonathon Rees, who built up a small, organized operation hiring police, burglars and bank officers. It is thought the bank officers supplied information for cleaning out bank accounts, particularly the royal family and their hangers on. There is no suggestion meant that the *News of the World* were cleaning out bank accounts, but just a hacker they employed.

Wikipedia says of the *News of the World*: “It had a reputation for exposing national or local celebrities as drug users, sex freaks or criminals, setting up insiders and journalists in disguise to provide either video or photographic evidence, and phone hacking”.

A New York police officer has claimed *News of the World* attempted to hack into the voicemails of the dead victims of the 9/11 terror attacks, the ex-officer claimed reporters wanted the victims’ phone numbers and details of the calls they had made and received in the days leading up to the atrocity.

Perhaps this crisis is the precursor for the emergence of a more brutal criminal state of society we are just about to enter into.

John C

New South Wales, Australia

11 July 2011

On “*Murdoch and the rule of the oligarchy*”

Thank you, Chris, for your article that alerts innocent world citizens to the complex fabric of modern society. Readers get convinced how politics, the media and coercive instruments of the imperialist nationalist state are interwoven into the fabric to deceive suffering masses in our world. There is no way out for the oppressed within the imperialist framework. The reproduction of this vicious fabric can be seen enshrined in different places at different times. The current East African scenario in my view is one expression of this. I totally agree with the solution you suggest in the last paragraph of your fine article.

IVE

Sri Lanka

11 July 2011

Dear WSWS,

May I ask nicely that you stop using the most interesting and useful word “hacking” as a category of criminal activity? While I am sure it is unintentional, in this you are following the lead of the loathsome *New York Times*. The *Times* has methodically slandered a large section of the computer community since the 1980s.

Used correctly, “hacking” is a complicated and subtle word. Very approximately, the idea of “hacking” is to develop technology for reasons other than making ICBMs or creating pervasive databases under the direction of government bureaucrats. “Hacking” is an exploration of ideas, often simply because they are interesting. There has always

been a sense of fun and creativity associated with the word. “Hacking” expresses a healthy approach to technology....

For example, “computer criminal” is a neutral and unambiguous term that could be used instead “hacker”. Terms like “fraud” or “computer intrusion” or “guessing a password” could be used for “hacking”. In these latter cases, the alternatives would actually be more expressive and better inform the public.

The use of the word “hacking” in the story regarding *News of the World* does a great deal to obfuscate what happened. What exactly did these reporters do? Did they guess the password on voicemail accounts? Did they bribe somebody at the phone company? Were the computers of the phone company compromised? Why is it so easy for these reporters to accomplish these tasks? Are our telephone companies irresponsible?

The reasons these questions are important is that it affects how we may respond to the problem. The impression we are given is that these problems cannot be prevented in any way other than increased funding for the police and harsh punishments for the alleged perpetrators.

There are other alternatives. For example, if it is simply the case that people are using short passwords which are easy to guess, then the public could be informed and told how to choose better passwords.

If the computer systems at the telephone company are not secure, then the question needs to be asked why they cannot be secured. News stories usually give the impression that computer crime is unpreventable, in essence because "hackers" who practice "dark" magic will always be able to penetrate them. This is not true. Usually security problems are due to carelessness. The press has methodically misrepresented this fact for decades.

Could it be that the lack of encryption on these devices has made them easier to compromise? If so, this would be a direct result of policies of the UK and the US to block the deployment of these well known technologies, most likely for the purpose of expanding "police powers." "Police" is used here in the sense of "secret police." It's entirely possible that the insecurity of these telephones in the UK is a direct consequence of government policy, an issue that should be of great interest to the public on both sides of the Atlantic.

I quite enjoy reading the *World Socialist Web Site*. Keep up the good work!

Peter
11 July 2011

On "*The American Historical Review discredits Robert Service's biography of Leon Trotsky*"

My most sincere and enthusiastic congratulations to David North for having been vindicated for his amazing work in defense of Leon Trotsky, one of the greatest minds of our time, if not all time. I am grateful also to Mr. Patenaude, an intelligent historian who exercised the courage of his convictions and exposed Robert Service for the base fraud he is. I am proud to make a donation to the WSWWS. I am so grateful for your indefatigable work.

GC
California
5 July 2011

On "*The US jobs crisis*"

Rocco, my friend, is a loan shark. He loaned all sorts of money to people who couldn't afford to borrow it. He raised interest rates without regard in a scheme called the Adjustable Rate Mortgage, also known as an ARM as in "I will break your arm if you do not pay". It's really funny now because the darndest thing happened a few years ago. You see, all sorts of people found they could not pay Rocco's new rates. He was in a jam for quite a while, but his friends are bankers and he is in with the G-men and even though the people borrowing claimed that they had been scammed and gouged in many cases, no help for them was offered. These victims complained to the government and their elected officials, but nothing was done. Rocco complained to his high-powered friends and guess what? He got millions of dollars to cover his "losses". Hilarious. Instead of negotiating with his "clients" to see what they could pay, he just chucked them out of their houses and repo'ed them and now that they are filled with rats and mold with grass growing ten feet tall he asks the city to cut at no cost to him...and they do it! Rocco also recently got some of his friends elected and now they've promised to cut government spending and oversight so that he can go about his "business" without anyone watching too closely. Only in America. They have even promised to cut his taxes.

PK
13 July 2011

On "*New York Times questions spending on 'Extremely Expensive Cancer Drugs'*"

There is of course an easy way to remedy all of this—tie the use of all drugs to Medicare. In other words, a drug will not be approved for use by anyone unless it is available to everyone. If it's not available to Medicare patients—it's not available for the wealthy. Easy, moral, and the right thing to do.

David T
11 July 2011

On "*European think-tank warns: Insurgency strengthening in Afghanistan*"

Dear WSWWS,

I read with great interest your article concerning the report of the US/NATO occupation of Afghanistan authored by the International Crisis Group. While the article clearly points out that the ICG report thoroughly contradicts the Obama administration's views on the occupation, I think the article failed to cover one important aspect of the story. Specifically, it failed to provide context regarding the ICG itself. While I am in agreement with their findings, I doubt I would probably agree with their agenda.

The ICG, according to their website, is "an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to preventing and resolving deadly contact". While claiming to be non-governmental, they report that 54 percent of their funding comes from governments, so one wonders how "non-governmental" they truly are. Of the remainder of their \$17 million budget, 26 percent comes from institutional foundations (Carnegie, MacArthur, Rockefeller, etc.) and 20 percent from individual and corporate donors (Chevron, Deutsche Bank, Morgan Stanley, etc.). Their CEO is a former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and their board of trustees is populated with former ambassadors, ministers, secretaries, and other prominent former government members, as well as CEOs and board members of corporations. Among their other trustees and advisors are people such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Wesley Clark, George Mitchell, and others, many of whom have actually played a role in the initiation of "deadly contact" rather than its prevention. So while I can applaud the ICG report for highlighting the lies and misinformation of the Obama administration regarding the Afghanistan occupation, I believe it is a mistake to accept the agenda of this report issued by this bourgeois think tank at face value. It is difficult to evaluate the findings of this ICG report independent of its class context.

Please keep up the unparalleled reporting, and I hope you will all keep trying to raise the bar too.

RW
California, USA
5 July 2011



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