German intelligence agencies expand monitoring of Internet

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5 March 2012

The German intelligence services have massively intensified the surveillance of the Internet. In 2010, they analyzed more than 37 million emails and data connections for "suspicious content." as was recently announced.

The Secret Service, Federal Intelligence Service (BND) and Military Counterintelligence Service (MAD) have accessed five times more data than in 2009. This emerges from a secret report by the Parliamentary Control Body (PKG) cited in the *Bild* newspaper.

The use of supposedly suspicious terms such as "bomb" is enough to fall into the claws of the intelligence agencies. These agencies were looking for a total of over 15,000 headline words, including 2,000 from the area of ??terrorism, 13,000 from proliferation (weaponry and trade), and 300 in connection with illegal smuggling.

What exactly is meant by "data connections" has not been publicly explained. It is conceivable that in addition to emails, this could include other communication tools such as online chat rooms, social networks, or even Internet phone calls (e.g., Skype).

Compared with the huge number of 37 million data connections in the dragnet, the number giving investigators cause to follow up was very low, just 213, i.e., 0.0006 percent.

The parliamentary oversight committee tried to justify the massive spying on Internet communication by referring to the increase of spam in 2010. In fact, the global delivery of spam increased between 2009 and 2010 by under one third, from approximately 73 trillion to about 95 trillion messages.

All the mainstream political parties have expressed only superficial criticism of the intelligence services. None of them rejects in principle the increasing surveillance of the Internet.

The domestic affairs political spokesperson for the Free Democratic Party (FDP), Gisela Piltz, expressed concern with the secret services being overloaded. The mass surveillance placed "the effectiveness of the work of the intelligence services in question."

Criticism by the opposition was in a similar vein. Green Party leader Renate Künast urged the security agencies to observe the proportionality principle, search terms should be made more precise so that the effort and results stood in better relationship, she said.

Her colleague Christian Ströbele tried to give the public a sense of security. There were unlikely to be any Germans or German companies affected by the surveillance, he said. In the end, it was about the "strategic monitoring of combined data transmissions via Asian or African countries."

If German nationals were affected, they would "in principle be covered by the protection of the constitution, with the obligation of immediate data deletion." Apparently, Ströbele thinks the population is naive: in most cases the victims never learn they have been spied upon at all—so how should they feel secure that data collected about them is actually deleted?

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) tried to play down the massive Internet monitoring. SPD Parliamentary Deputy Michael Hartmann described the excitement as "a storm in a teacup," claiming that it merely concerned the monitoring of international communications.

Jan Korte, an expert on security policy for the Left Party, urged the federal government to review the surveillance laws and powers of intervention for their proportionality.

None of the established political parties has sought to expose this scandalous state of affairs. They are not

bothered that in the name of "fighting terrorism" the rights of working people are being increasingly eroded. Instead, they downplay the situation and couple that with suggestions on how the monitoring of the population can be done more efficiently.

This is not surprising when one considers that all the parliamentary parties—from the SPD-Green federal government, followed by the Grand Coalition of the SPD and Christian Democrats and now the Christian Democratic-Free Democratic coalition, to state governments which include the Left Party—have overseen a massive redistribution of wealth from those at the bottom of society to those at the top.

But resistance is now stirring against this politically prescribed poverty. In the last year, two long-term, Western-backed dictators were overthrown—in Tunisia and Egypt. In Europe and the US, there have been mass demonstrations that have placed a question mark over the capitalist system. In all this, new forms of communication such as social networks, Twitter and the like have played an important role in organising and coordinating protests.

In times of mass rebellion, the ruling class can no longer tolerate such unfettered possibilities of global communication. Therefore, in recent months there have been several attempts to gain control over ever-larger parts of the Internet and telecommunications systems. The latest example is the originally secret ACTA agreement, which under the guise of "intellectual property rights" seeks to record the addresses of individual computers ("IP address"), with massive implications for privacy and freedom of expression.

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