

# Trump administration demands Internet records on 1.3 million political opponents

Don Barrett, Niles Niemuth

17 August 2017

A Washington DC Superior Court will hear a challenge Friday to the ominous and anti-democratic warrant filed by the US Department of Justice (DoJ), demanding the emails, logs of visitor Internet addresses, contact information and photographs relating to the website DisruptJ20.org, a group that coordinated protests at President Donald Trump's January 20 inauguration.

The search warrant, issued July 12, was directed at Los Angeles-based provider DreamHost, which hosts DisruptJ20.org on its servers, allowing individuals to access and use the site online. If the warrant is enforced, the activities of some 1.3 million visitors will be revealed to the government through the seizure of their personal Internet records.

DreamHost is challenging the warrant in the Superior Court. DreamHost's general counsel, Chris Ghazarian, characterized the warrant as "a sweeping request for every single file we have." He added, "The search warrant is not only dealing with everything in relation to the website, but also tons of data about people who visited it."

The company's filing notes: "Scrutiny of this type demonstrates that the warrant lacks the specificity required by the Fourth Amendment and is unreasonable as a whole. In addition, the search warrant violates the Privacy Protection Act and was not authorized by District of Columbia law. For the foregoing reasons, DreamHost respectfully requests that the government's motion be denied."

Mark Rumold, a senior staff attorney at the Electronic Freedom Foundation, a digital rights group which has been advising DreamHost in its efforts to fight the warrant, denounced the warrant as an unconstitutional "fishing expedition."

The warrant is part of a wide-ranging investigation

into the DisruptJ20 inauguration day demonstrations in which several hundred people were arrested following several incidents of vandalism in which black bloc anarchists smashed bank and chain restaurant windows, threw garbage cans in the street, set off fireworks and injured six police officers.

While the vast majority of those arrested did not engage in any acts of vandalism, they now face charges of felony rioting, which carries a sentence of up to ten years in prison and a \$25,000 fine. While all criminal charges have been dropped against the journalists, medics and legal observers among those arrested, 214 people face the possibility of long prison sentences for allegedly participating in the anti-Trump protest.

It cannot be ruled out that the vandalism was a provocation by the police themselves to justify the mass arrest of protesters and a further crackdown on democratic rights. It is well known that black bloc anarchist groups, whose members conceal their identities by wearing masks, are often riddled with police agents. The *Washington Post* reported in April that court documents revealed that police agents had infiltrated and participated in logistical meetings in the period before the January 20 protest.

Regardless of the political motivations of those involved in the protest, the DoJ's wide-ranging investigation is aimed at suppressing popular opposition to the Trump administration's anti-democratic policies and blocking left-wing political organization on the Internet.

The ruling class is well aware of the power of the Internet for facilitating protests from below, and even revolutions, such as the 2011 Egyptian and Tunisian revolts which overthrew long-time dictators Hosni Mubarak and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. While social media services like Twitter have been promoted by the

State Department as a means of destabilizing and overthrowing regimes which stand in the way of American imperialist interests, the ruling class fears the implications at home.

This is not the first attack on Internet dissenters by the Trump administration, but may be the first one to be aired in court. A Customs and Border Patrol warrant in March demanded identifying information for a Twitter account that published anonymous postings from individuals within the government critical of Trump's policies. A public outcry and lawsuit led to the dropping of the warrant only weeks later.

Massive governmental intrusions into the daily lives and political activities of the population have become a defining feature of contemporary life in the United States. The erosion of constitutional guarantees has developed hand in hand with the need of the ruling class to suppress any signs of opposition from the working class.

While the Trump administration and the Republican congressional leadership attack democratic rights in a crude and brazen manner, the attack on fundamental democratic rights has long occupied both parties of the American ruling class.

No honest appraisal of the Trump administration's attitude towards privacy is possible without reference to the vast expansion of domestic and international electronic surveillance by the National Security Agency under the Obama administration.

The DoJ under Obama brought Espionage Act charges against more people for leaking to the media than any other administration. Among those convicted or charged under Obama are Chelsea Manning (sentenced to 35 years in military prison), John Kiriakou (sentenced to 2.5 years in federal prison) and Edward Snowden (exiled in Russia).

Since the election of Trump last year, the Democratic Party and allied media such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have been clamoring for Internet censorship of news and analysis that challenges the official narrative of the government on questions of war and domestic politics, on the grounds that all such material is "fake news" and "conspiracy theories."

The Democrats' unsubstantiated claims that Vladimir Putin and the Russian government used the Internet to influence the 2016 presidential election has been used to justify a widespread crackdown on a broad range of

alternative media outlets. They have thereby created the pretext for Google to blacklist leading socialist and progressive media outlets, the *World Socialist Web Site* in particular.

The Trump administration's effort to obtain information on those who accessed the DisruptJ20 website is an indication of the further crackdown on political dissent and attack on democratic rights which is being prepared at the highest levels of the state.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**