Internal FBI reports document mass surveillance of left-wing, anti-police violence social media accounts following 2020 police murder of George Floyd

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Internal FBI documents published last week by the government transparency group Property of the People have revealed that the Federal Bureau of Investigation, for years, routinely violated the democratic rights of millions of people in the United States by monitoring their private social media accounts even if they were not suspected of any criminal activity.

The documents, known as "Situational Reports" or "sitreps" were obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request by Property of the People and shared with reporters for *Rolling Stone* magazine. While the reports are revealing, they do have large sections blacked out.

The reports show that FBI employees were/are monitoring private social media accounts and specific hashtags on the largest social media platforms, such as Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

The information included in the reports covers a three-year span, from 2019 through 2021. Sitreps from the summer and fall 2020, following the police murder of George Floyd, show that the FBI tracked protest organizers' accounts in Seattle, Washington and Minneapolis, Minnesota. While Property of the People and *Rolling Stone* have only reported on FBI documents covering those two cities, there is no doubt similar reports were drawn up for every major US city.

More extensive and detailed analyses are no doubt compiled by the FBI on a regular basis. But even the limited release under the FOIA reveals blatant disregard for the democratic rights of the population and underscores the central role of the "special armed body" in capitalist society as an enforcer of bourgeois class rule, not an impartial protector of the democratic rights of all.

The documents revealed that the FBI has teams dubbed "social-media exploitation," or SOMEX teams, that comb through social media accounts for information on peaceful protests, including meeting times, locations and participants. Potential targets of surveillance include anyone suspected of being "involved in or present at locations of lawful protests [who] are part of an organized effort associated with anti-government-anti-authority extremism, militia extremism, racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism, or violent gangs."

The agency distributes information gleaned from accounts they monitor to local police departments which is then assimilated into police databases, in the process painting a target on anyone named in the reports as a potential "extremist," "Black Lives Matter," "anarchist," or "antifa" agitator.

That the FBI violates the constitutional and democratic rights of workers and left-wing elements as a daily practice will not come as a surprise to our readers. However, the revelation that the FBI has been engaged in mass surveillance of social media accounts, including specific hashtags, Facebook groups and private media accounts for years, directly contradicts testimony offered by FBI director Christopher Wray and FBI assistant director of counterterrorism Jill Sanborn before Congress last year, following Trump's failed coup.

Attempting to explain why the FBI was not prepared to intervene to stop the attack on the Capitol by right-wing militias, or issue widespread warnings beforehand, in two separate hearings, both top FBI officials claimed that the FBI had "specific policies" that prevented the organization from monitoring social media accounts prior to the attack on the Capitol.

As reported last year by the *World Socialist Web Site*, during a March 2021 hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar took as good coin Wray's claims that the FBI could not foresee the attack on the Capitol because they had insufficient

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“intelligence” and no informants within any of the far-right organizations.

Speaking of the Proud Boys, Klobuchar pontificated: “There must be moments, if only we could have known, if we could have infiltrated this group and found out what they are doing. Do you have those moments?”

Beside the fact that it was known at the time Klobuchar made these comments that chairman of the Proud Boys, Henry ‘Enrique’ Tarrio, was a “prolific” FBI informant, subsequent reports have established that the FBI, Capitol Police and the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police were monitoring right-wing paramilitaries’ communications in real time on January 6, 2021 and were well aware of their plan to storm and occupy the Capitol in furtherance of Trump’s coup prior to the attack.

Following Trump’s failed coup, it has also been revealed that social media companies, such as Parler, sent the FBI reports they had made compiled of specific threats they saw regarding the January 6 certification. In one warning forwarded to the FBI prior to the attack, a Parler user called on fascists to come to D.C. on January 6 to take on “Antifa” and “start eliminating people.”

The documents blow apart Wray’s claims that the FBI failed to prevent the attack on the Capitol because of a lack of “intelligence” and the Bureau respecting the constitutional and the democratic rights of fascist militia groups too much to follow their activities online. They also show the FBI’s role in promoting the lie advanced by Trump and his Republican sycophants that the amorphous “antifa” is a violent and dangerous terrorist group while modern-day Brownshirts, such as the Proud Boys, are a “patriotic fraternity.”

In a June 5, 2020 Seattle sitrep, the FBI specifically named an Instagram user’s private account for simply organizing a “peaceful protest” in support of Black Lives Matter. In the same report, the FBI observed that “Proud boys” and “3%ers will be present during the 6/7 BLM protests, in civilian clothes.”

In contrast to the “peaceful protest” organizer, the FBI did not name any suspected Proud Boys handles. Instead, the report reiterates Proud Boys talking points, stating that the “‘Proud Boys’ consider themselves a patriotic fraternity. All races are represented within the ‘Proud Boys.’”

Among the tools used by the FBI to monitor social media, at the cost of $5 million a year, *Rolling Stone* reported, is software called Babel X, which is sold by a company called Babel Street. Per a recent article by Fedscoop, Babel Street is led by “Jeffrey Chapman, a former Treasury Department official. ... Chapman was a White House aide and intelligence officer at the Department of Defense, according to LinkedIn.”

In a statement announcing a new contract with Babel Street, the FBI wrote earlier this month, “[t]he tool shall be able to gather information from the following mandatory online and social media data sources: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Deep/Dark Web, VK, and Telegram,” as well as SnapChat, TikTok, Reddit, 8Kun, Gab, Parler, ask.fm, Weibo, Discord, and “additional fringe platforms, and other encrypted message platforms.”

“In procurement documents, the FBI said ... the system should be able to continuously monitor sources,” wrote Fedscoop.

Commenting on the FBI reports, Ryan Shapiro, executive director of Property of the People, told *Rolling Stone*, “The documents bring into relief three consistent truths about the FBI.”

“One: At its core, the FBI is a political police force that primarily targets the left while ignoring or outright enabling the far-right. Two: FBI spokespersons lie like they breathe. Three: The Bureau shamelessly exploits national crises to expand the already dystopian reach of its surveillance.”

The domestic intelligence agency is aided in their efforts to oppress the working class by the Republican and Democratic Party alike. Ignoring the demands of millions of workers and youth who risked police violence and arrest to march for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Hannah Fizer, Andres Guardado and all victims of police violence, Biden and the Democrats have purged all talk of “defunding” the police following the 2020 election.

Instead, appealing to their “Republican colleagues” and billionaire backers, Biden’s 2023 budget proposal, the WSWS wrote recently, features “...a substantial increase for domestic police repression.”

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