

Death Of The Internet: Unprecedented Censorship Bill Passes in UK

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A draconian Internet censorship bill that has been long looming on the horizon finally [passed the house of commons](#) in the UK yesterday, legislating for government powers to restrict and filter any website that is deemed to be undesirable for public consumption.

The “[Digital Economy Bill](#)” was rushed through parliament in a late night session last night after a third reading.

In the wake of the announcement of a general election on May 6, the government has taken advantage of what is known as the “wash-up process”, allowing the legislative process to be speeded up between an election being called and Parliament being dissolved.

Only a pitiful handful of MPs (pictured below) were present to debate the bill, which was fully supported by the “opposition” Conservative party, and passed by 189 votes to 47 keeping the majority of its original clauses intact.

The bill will now go back to the House of Lords, where it originated, for a final formal approval.

The government removed a proposal in clause 18 of the bill, which openly stated that it could block any website, however it was replaced with an amendment to clause 8 of the bill which essentially legislates for the same powers.

The new clause allows the unelected secretary of state for business, currently Lord Mandelson, to order the blocking of “a location on the internet which the court is satisfied has been, is being or is likely to be used for or in connection with an activity that infringes copyright”.

Opposing MPs argued that the clause was too broad and open ended, arguing that the phrase “likely to be used” could be used to block websites without them ever having been used for “activity that infringes copyright”. Other MPs argued that under the bill, whistleblower websites, such as Wikileaks, could be targeted.

The legislation will also allow the Home Secretary to place “a technical obligation on internet service providers” to block whichever sites it wishes.

Under [clause 11](#) of the proposed legislation “technical obligation” is defined as follows:

A “technical obligation”, in relation to an internet service provider, is an obligation for the provider to take a technical measure against particular

subscribers to its service.

A “technical measure” is a measure that — (a) limits the speed or other capacity of the service provided to a subscriber; (b) prevents a subscriber from using the service to gain access to particular material, or limits such use; (c) suspends the service provided to a subscriber; or (d) limits the service provided to a subscriber in another way.

In other words, the government will have the power to force ISPs to downgrade and even block your internet access to certain websites or altogether if it wishes.

The legislation is part of an amplified effort by the government to seize more power over the internet and those who use it.

For months now unelected “Secretary of State” Lord Mandelson has overseen government efforts to [challenge the independence of the of UK’s internet infrastructure](#).

The Digital Economy Bill will also see [users’ broadband access cut off indefinitely](#), in addition to a fine of up to £50,000 without evidence or trial, if they download copyrighted music and films. The plan has been identified as “potentially illegal” by experts.

The legislation would impose a duty on ISPs to effectively spy on all their customers by keeping records of the websites they have visited and the material they have downloaded. ISPs who refuse to cooperate could be fined £250,000.

As [Journalist and copyright law expert Cory Doctrow](#) has noted, the bill also gives the Secretary of State the power to make up as many new penalties and enforcement systems as he likes, without Parliamentary oversight or debate.

This could include the authority to appoint private militias, who will have the power to kick you off the internet, spy on your use of the network, demand the removal of files in addition to the blocking of websites.

Mandelson and his successors will have the power to invent any penalty, including jail time, for any digital transgression he deems Britons to be guilty of.

Despite being named the Digital Economy Bill, the legislation contains nothing that will actually stimulate the economy and is largely based on shifting control over the internet into government hands, allowing unaccountable bureaucrats to arbitrarily hide information from the public should they wish to do so.

Mandelson began the onslaught on the free internet in the UK after spending a luxury two week [holiday at Nat Rothschild’s Corfu mansion](#) with multi-millionaire record company executive David Geffen.

[Over 20,000 members of the public](#) have written to their MPs in the last week to lobby against the bill being rushed through, however, their concerns have fallen on deaf ears and the government has been allowed to deal a devastating blow to the last real vestige of free speech in this country.

The Wider Agenda Of Internet Control

The Digital Economy Bill is intrinsically linked to long term plans by the UK government to carry out an unprecedented extension of state powers by claiming the authority to monitor all emails, phone calls and internet activity nationwide.

IN 2008, the government announced its intention to [create a massive central database](#), gathering details on every text sent, e-mail sent, phone call made and website visited by everyone in the UK.

The programme, known as the “Interception Modernisation Programme”, would allow spy chiefs at GCHQ, the government’s secret eavesdropping agency, the centre for Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) activities (pictured above), to effectively place a “live tap” on every electronic communication in Britain in the name of preventing terrorism.

Following outcry over the announcement, the government suggested that it was [scaling down the plans](#), with then Home Secretary Jacqui Smith stating that there were “absolutely no plans for a single central store” of communications data.

However, as the “climbdown” was celebrated by civil liberties advocates and the plan was “replaced” by [new laws](#) requiring ISPs to store details of emails and internet telephony for just 12 months, fresh details emerged indicating the government was implementing a big brother spy system that far outstrips the original public announcement.

The London Times published leaked details of a [secret mass internet surveillance](#) project known as “Mastering the Internet” (MTI).

Costing hundreds of millions in public funds, the system is already being implemented by GCHQ with the aid of American defence giant Lockheed Martin and British IT firm Detica, which has close ties to the intelligence agencies.

A group of over 300 internet service providers and telecommunications firms has [attempted to fight back over the radical plans](#), describing the proposals as an unwarranted invasion of people’s privacy.

Currently, any interception of a communication in Britain must be authorised by a warrant signed by the home secretary or a minister of equivalent rank. Only individuals who are the subject of police or security service investigations may be subject to surveillance.

If the GCHQ’s MTI project is completed, black-box probes would be placed at critical traffic junctions with internet service providers and telephone companies, allowing eavesdroppers to instantly monitor the communications of every person in the country without the need for a warrant.

Even if you believe GCHQ’s denial that it has any plans to create a huge monitoring system, the current law under the RIPA (the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act) allows hundreds of government agencies access to the records of every internet provider in the country.

In publicly announced proposals to extend these powers, firms will be asked to collect and store even more vast amounts of data, including from social networking sites such as Facebook.

If the plans go ahead, every internet user will be given a unique ID code and all their data will be stored in one place. Government agencies such as the police and security services

will have access to the data should they request it with respect to criminal or terrorist investigations.

This is clearly the next step in an incremental program to implement an already exposed full scale big brother spy system designed to completely obliterate privacy, a fundamental right under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Death Of The Internet In Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the U.S.

Similar efforts to place restrictions on the internet are unfolding in Australia where the government is [implementing a mandatory and wide-ranging internet filter](#) modeled on that of the Communist Chinese government.

Australian communication minister Stephen Conroy said the government would be the final arbiter on what sites would be blacklisted under “refused classification.”

The official justification for the filter is to block child pornography, however, as the watchdog group [Electronic Frontiers Australia](#) has pointed out, the law will also allow the government to block any website it desires while the pornographers can relatively easily skirt around the filters.

Earlier this year, the Wikileaks website published a leaked [secret list of sites slated to be blocked](#) by Australia’s state-sponsored parental filter.

The list revealed that blacklisted sites included “online poker sites, YouTube links, regular gay and straight porn sites, Wikipedia entries, euthanasia sites, websites of fringe religions such as satanic sites, fetish sites, Christian sites, the website of a tour operator and even a Queensland dentist.”

The filter will even [block web-based games](#) deemed unsuitable for anyone over the age of fifteen, according to the Australian government.

In neighbouring New Zealand, the government has [quietly implemented an internet filter](#) and is urging the leading ISPs in the country to adopt the measure, in a move that would give the authorities the power to restrict whichever websites they see fit.

The New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) reportedly turned on the internet filter on February 1st without making any announcement, prompting critics to charge that the measure had been activated in stealth.

It was no coincidence that around the same time the government’s Internet filter went live, Infowars began receiving notification from readers in New Zealand that their access to Alex Jones’ flagship websites Infowars.com and Prisonplanet.com had been suddenly blocked.

The broad attack on the free internet is not only restricted to the UK, New Zealand and Australia.

The European Union, Finland, Denmark, Germany and other countries in Europe have all proposed blocking or limiting access to the internet and using filters like those used in Iran, Syria, China, and other repressive regimes.

In 2008 in the U.S., The [Motion Picture Association of America](#) asked president Obama to

introduce laws that would allow the federal government to effectively spy on the entire Internet, establishing a system where being accused of copyright infringement would result in loss of your Internet connection.

In 2009 the [Cybersecurity Act was introduced](#), proposing to allow the federal government to tap into any digital aspect of every citizen's information without a warrant. Banking, business and medical records would be wide open to inspection, as well as personal instant message and e mail communications.

[The legislation](#), introduced by Senators John Rockefeller (D-W. Va.) and Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) in April, gives the president the ability to "declare a cybersecurity emergency" and shut down or limit Internet traffic in any "critical" information network "in the interest of national security." The bill does not define a critical information network or a cybersecurity emergency. That definition would be left to the president, according to a [Mother Jones report](#).

During a hearing on the bill, Senator John Rockefeller betrayed the true intent behind the legislation when he stated, "Would it have been better if we'd have never invented the Internet," while fearmongering about cyber attacks on the U.S. government and how the country could be shut down.

Watch the clip below.

The Obama White House has also sought a [private contractor to "crawl and archive" data](#) such as comments, tag lines, e-mail, audio and video from any place online where the White House "maintains a presence" - for a period of up to eight years.

Obama has also proposed scaling back a long-standing ban on [tracking how people use government Internet sites](#) with "cookies" and other technologies.

Recent disclosures under the Freedom Of Information Act also reveal that the [federal government has several contracts](#) with social media outlets such as Youtube (Google), Facebook, Myspace and Flickr (Yahoo) that waive rules on monitoring users and permit companies to track visitors to government web sites for advertising purposes.

[The U.S. military](#) also has some \$30 Billion invested in it's own mastering the internet projects.

We have extensively covered efforts to [scrap the internet](#) as we know it and move toward a greatly restricted "internet 2" system. All of the above represents stepping stones toward the realisation of that agenda.

The free internet is under attack the world over, only by exposing the true intentions of our governments to restrict the flow of data can we defeat such efforts and preserve what is left of the last vestige of independent information.

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