

WHY SHOULD WE OPPOSE PATRIOT I AND II?

The Bush Administration strong-armed the “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism” Act through Congress immediately after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Better known as the USA PATRIOT Act, it was rushed through Congress so quickly that many representatives didn’t even read its full text. Their failure to debate this Act has gravely endangered our civil liberties. Now, the Bush Administration wants to extend government surveillance and the attack on the Bill of Rights through the Domestic Security Enhancement Act, better known as Patriot II. While the final wording of Patriot II is uncertain, its intention is clear: it will remove checks on the government’s intelligence gathering powers, reduce government accountability, obliterate judicial oversight, and further broaden the definition of “terrorism.”

Stifling Dissent is Undemocratic

The right to dissent is crucial for the health and vitality of our democracy. But under the PATRIOT Act, “domestic terrorism” has been defined so broadly that it can be used to target activists opposing U.S. policies. It has already been revealed that government agencies, such as the California Anti-Terrorism Information Center, spied on anti-war activists during the lead up to, and during, the war against Iraq.

Big Brother is Listening

FBI and CIA powers to wiretap phones and trace emails have been expanded. Thousands of U.S. residents from the Middle East have been watched and wiretapped already. Such increased surveillance poses a direct threat to our privacy, and must be stopped!

Immigrants’ Safety is in Danger

Under PATRIOT I, the government has indefinitely detained thousands of Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians for minor immigration violations and on “material witness” warrants. 13,000 of these immigrants have been targeted for planned deportations.

Our Homes Should Be Our Castles

Under PATRIOT I, law enforcement officials have been given the power to conduct “sneak and peek” searches of home residences without notifying the occupant until after the search has been completed. Even then, notification can be delayed for a “reasonable period.” This is a suspension of our Fourth Amendment right to protection from unreasonable searches and seizures!

Student Records are At Stake

The PATRIOT Act allows law enforcement officials to cast a broad net over students, without any particular suspicion of wrongdoing. Law enforcement officials have access to highly personal and usually confidential student information. This includes student coursework and grades, financial information, and just about any other confidential information maintained by educational institutions. Transmitting this information to federal agencies could lead to adverse consequences completely unrelated to the fight against terrorism, and leaves foreign students vulnerable to investigations based upon racial profiling.

They Know What Books We’re Reading

As a result of the PATRIOT Act, the FBI has access to library records and bookstore receipts of anyone “suspected” of terrorist activity. Even worse, a gag order prevents librarians and bookstore employees from ever disclosing that they have been approached for information about customers’ reading habits.

We Are Not Safer

The Patriot Act is NOT increasing Americans’ security or fighting terrorism. By compiling information about thousands of innocent immigrants and citizens who oppose U.S. policies, PATRIOT I has created a convoluted haystack that must be sifted through in order to find any semblance of a real terrorist threat. Further, by focusing surveillance efforts on groups of individuals matching specific ethnic or racial profiles, attention has strayed from investigations of actual evidence.

TAKE ACTION TO DEFEND OUR CIVIL LIBERTIES!

CALL YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES. Tell your Senators and Representatives you oppose the PATRIOT Act and ask them to block passage of PATRIOT II. Also ask them to support good legislation, like Representative Bernie Sander's proposed HR 1157, the "Freedom to Read Protection Act of 2003." The Capitol Switchboard is 202-224-3121.

CIRCULATE A PETITION. Create a petition demanding the repeal of PATRIOT I and the prevention of PATRIOT II. Collect as many signatures as you can in public spaces affected by this legislation, including local bookstores, libraries, and college campuses. Ask local constituents and groups to endorse your petition to increase local momentum. Send it to your Senators and Representatives.

GET INFORMED AND INFORM YOUR PEERS. Organize teach-ins and invite speakers to campuses or community centers. Distribute pamphlets and brochures about PATRIOT I and II and the Bill of Rights. Organizations with useful resources include: the Bill of Rights Defense Committee www.bordc.org, National Lawyers Guild <http://www.nlg.org>, American Civil Liberties Union www.aclu.org, Reclaim Democracy reclaimdemocracy.org/civil_rights/, Center for Constitutional Rights www.ccr-ny.org, and Patriot Watch www.patriotwatch.org/.

CONNECT TO THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT. Strengthen the national coalition fighting the PATRIOT Acts by attending the 1st National "Grassroots America Defends the Bill of Rights" Conference in Washington, DC on October 18-19. The conference will consist of two days of strategizing and policy workshops working towards building up the Bill of Rights defense movement. Monday, October 20 is People's Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill, in which conferees will meet with congressional delegations. For more information, see www.bordc.org/natmeetflier.pdf.

DEFEND YOUR FREEDOM. Become a visible presence in your local July 4th Parade, Labor Day Parade, or in the Immigrant Worker's Freedom Ride. Organize a group to march with attention-grabbing signs, leaflets, brochures, and buttons. Other great ways to reach out to your local community include creative visuals and floats in parades, as well as organized street theatre. For ideas, see www.bordc.org/July4.htm and www.iwfr.org.

SPEAK OUT. Write a letter to the editor or call in to a radio show to express your ideas. We absolutely need to defend our freedom and civil liberties, which are vital to the vision of democracy as outlined in our Bill of Rights!

STAND UP FOR IMMIGRANTS. Stay informed on how the PATRIOT Act has affected immigrants. Network with like-minded individuals and groups to assemble and protest INS deportations and discrimination against Arabs and Muslims. Wear blue triangles as symbols of resistance on behalf of immigrants who have been affected. For more information, see www.bluetriangle.org. Come out for the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, inspired by the Civil Rights-era Freedom Riders. The September 2003 ride is scheduled to leave from nine major U.S. cities, crossing our nation and converging in DC to talk to Congress. Show your support for the riders and lobby your organization to endorse it. For more information, see www.iwfr.org.

PUSH FOR LOCAL RESOLUTIONS. Many local governments have already passed resolutions against the PATRIOT Act. Check to see if your local city council has passed resolutions, and organize public forums to encourage a resolution in your community. For more information, see www.bordc.org/OtherLocalEfforts.htm. Resources for organizing resolutions can be found at www.bordc.org/Tools.htm.