The Postman Doesn't Ring Twice. Or Even Once. He Spies on Your Facebook and Twitter Accounts.

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) is watching you. And most likely, it's watching you even more closely if you're a conservative.

How the USPS has time to spy when it can't get the mail delivered on time is anyone's guess, but the money-losing operation is, Yahoo News reported on Wednesday, coding and tracking your activities on social media.

The effort is called the Internet Covert Operations Program, and it's using taxpayer money not to stop employees from stealing checks from the mail, but instead to find out if you're guilty of WrongThink.

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> The law enforcement arm of the U.S. Postal Service has been quietly running a program that tracks and collects Americans' social media posts, including those about planned protests, according to a document obtained by Yahoo News.https://t.co/XDHAt9cJBv
>
> — Yahoo News (@YahooNews) April 21, 2021

Secret Agency

The heretofore-unknown program, Yahoo reported, has "analysts trawl through social media sites to look for what the document describes as 'inflammatory' postings and then sharing that information across government agencies."

Yahoo uncovered a "Situational Awareness Bulletin" from the agency's Inspection Service that is marked "law enforcement sensitive." Dated March 16, it rocketed through the Department of Homeland Security's "fusion centers."

The bulletin said "analysts with the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) Internet Covert Operations Program (iCOP) monitored significant activity regarding planned protests occurring internationally and domestically on March 20, 2021."

As well, "iCOP analysts are currently monitoring these social media channels for any potential threats stemming from the scheduled protests and will disseminate intelligence updates as needed."

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"Locations and times have been identified for these protests, which are being distributed online across multiple social media platforms, to include right-wing leaning Parler and Telegram accounts," the bulletin said:

> Parler users have commented about their intent to use the rallies to engage in violence. Image 3 on the right is a screenshot from Parler indicating two users discussing the event

as an opportunity to engage in a 'fight' and to 'do serious damage.'" No intelligence is available to suggest the legitimacy of these threats.

The bulletin mentioned the Proud Boys, and the USPS cyber gumshoes also monitored posts about an anti-5G rally scheduled for March 20.

Nowhere does the bulletin Yahoo published mention hard-left insurrectionist elements such as BLM or Antifa, which does not mean the USPS isn't monitoring those groups. Nor did the bulletin iCOP had pick up social-media posts about the riots that were undoubtedly planned had the jury in the show trial of Derek Chauvin returned a not-guilty verdict.

No Mandate for Spying

Even leftist civil libertarians didn't like what they heard about the program, Yahoo reported:

> "It's a mystery," said University of Chicago law professor Geoffrey Stone, whom President Barack Obama appointed to review the National Security Agency's bulk data collection in the wake of the Edward Snowden leaks. "I don't understand why the government would go to the Postal Service for examining the internet for security issues."

Said Rachel Levinson-Waldman, deputy director of the Brennan Center for Justice's liberty and national security program, "this seems a little bizarre."

"A little bizarre?" How about a little dangerous?

Continued Levinson-Waldman:

> Based on the very minimal information that's available online, it appears that [iCOP] is meant to root out misuse of the postal system by online actors, which doesn't seem to encompass what's going on here. It's not at all clear why their mandate would include monitoring of social media that's unrelated to use of the postal system.

Levinson-Waldman also questioned the legal authority of the Postal Service to monitor social-media activity. "If the individuals they're monitoring are carrying out or planning criminal activity, that should be the purview of the FBI," she said. "If they're simply engaging in lawfully protected speech, even if it's odious or objectionable, then monitoring them on that basis raises serious constitutional concerns."

The Postal Service claimed that part of its job is to "protect the U.S. Postal Service and its employees, infrastructure, and customers; enforce the laws that defend the nation's mail system from illegal or dangerous use; and ensure public trust in the mail."

Spying on Americans who exercise their First Amendment-protected rights, the bloated, unprofitable agency said, is part of its job:

> The Internet Covert Operations Program is a function within the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, which assesses threats to Postal Service employees and its infrastructure by monitoring publicly available open source information.

> Additionally, the Inspection Service collaborates with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to proactively identify and assess potential threats to the Postal

Service, its employees and customers, and its overall mail processing and transportation network.

Yahoo reported that professor Stone was puzzled. "I just don't think the Postal Service has the degree of sophistication that you would want if you were dealing with national security issues of this sort," he told Yahoo.

Indeed. The agency has enough trouble, again, delivering mail. Maybe it should stick to that.

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