

BIG BROTHER

Disguised as Homeland Security

By Antonio C. Cabral

Labor leaders call it the most anti-worker transformation of the U.S. government in many years. Some Democrats labeled it Bush's new bureaucratic empire while the ACLU warns that it is a threat to the American tradition of open government. They are describing Bush's new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that the right wing fringe now running Washington pushed through Congress last month with the help of some Democrats.

The DHS will combine 22 federal agencies into one giant department including the Coast Guard, the Customs Service, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Border Patrol, Secret Service, the Transportation Authority Administration and others.

The DHS marks the most sweeping change to the federal system since 1947 but today it's being used to protect corporate interests and hurt workers. Bush argued that the DHS is necessary "to make certain that those who respond to terrorist attacks are well trained."

However, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that it will take up to 10 years for the DHS to be operational. "We face an immediate threat of more terrorist attacks," complained Representative Jim Moran (D-VA) during the House's debate. "The American people can't wait 10 years for us to protect their safety."

Representative Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH) summarized the fallacy of Bush's claim that the DHS will mean greater safety for the public. "It does not provide the funds needed to prepare and equip local police, firemen and paramedics to respond to terrorist attacks. When people in my district face such attacks, they will not pick up the phone to call the DHS, they will call 911 and it will be the local police, firemen and paramedics who will respond!"

The new law contains a provision that strips 170,000 DHS employees of rights covered under Title V of federal law that protects government workers from whistle blowing retaliation and other abuses. It suspends collective bargaining rights and

other federal worker protections won over the past 75 years. "How can protecting us from terrorism justify taking away employment rights from federal workers?" Asked U.S. Representative Albert Wynn (D-MD).

Any DHS employee can be fired arbitrarily, for example, if his or her political beliefs differ from the Administration's. In other words, Bush is bringing home his international campaign of fear, bullying and regime change by telling U.S. federal workers "it's my way or the highway, you are with me or against me."

According to the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), that stands to lose over 30,000 union members, President Bush signed an Executive Order recently stripping over 1000 Department of Justice employees of their union rights and civil service protections. Bush's justification: National Security.

In addition to hurting DHS employees, the new law also will hurt workers of private construction companies because the Republicans inserted a clause exempting new projects from the Davis-Bacon Act. This law has required since 1950 that all companies receiving federally assisted construction contracts pay

their workers decent wages.

Representative Corrine Brown (D-FLA) called this a "A glaring example of President Bush's anti-worker policies."

AFGE President Bobby L. Harnage Sr., speaking at a rally, said, "Bush talks about needing 'flexibility' to hire and fire. What he really wants is to decide who gets federal jobs and who gets fired, all actions that have nothing to do with security but a lot do with cronyism and political pay backs."

Yet, neither Harnage nor the AFL-CIO leadership took any action to mobilize grass-root opposition. In most other countries, union members and their broader communities would have been militantly protesting in the streets and storming the offices of politicians. Instead, Harnage and AFL-CIO President John Sweeney simply issued meaningless

statements while they watched the same Democrats that they supported in previous elections vote to approve this anti-worker law.

Bush and Republican legislators also shamelessly inserted several clauses to protect large corporations that will benefit from contracts issued under the homeland security effort. For example, Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA) pointed out that pharmaceutical corporations contracted to make immunization vaccines to protect people from biochemical attacks cannot be sued even if they are negligent in making the vaccine and people die from it or are injured for life.

Several parents throughout the U.S. have filed suit against vaccine makers because their children developed autism after being vaccinated with thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative that has been used in infant vaccines.

According to lawyers of the Dallas-based law firm Waters & Kraus that is suing the giant Eli Lilly pharmaceutical company, several documents they obtained show that Eli Lilly knew the danger of its thimerosal vaccine, now implicated in a number of cases involving neurological damage to infants.

Republicans argued that the DHS law needed to protect vaccine makers from thimerosal law suits despite the fact that smallpox nor anthrax vaccines, the primary defenses against possible biological warfare, do not contain thimerosal. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson shamelessly told CNN that the provision protecting vaccine makers from mercury vaccine lawsuits was "necessary to protect them from greedy lawyers." Hutchinson and other Republicans failed to mention that Eli Lilly donated over \$1 million dollars to Republican candidates during the last election.

Also inserted into the DHS legislation was the Cyber Security Enhancement Act (CSEA). San Antonio's Lamar Smith originally sponsored the CSEA that allows police to conduct Internet or telephone eavesdropping without a court order. ACLU's attorney Timothy Edgar called this and other DHS provisions dangerous attempts to exempt it from several laws designed to keep government open and accountable to the public.

Conservative New York Times columnist William Safire, a former Nixon Administration official, expressed his dismay over this threat to constitutional rights. "Every time you use your credit card, buy a medical prescription, use the Internet or E-mail, etc. (your personal data) will go into what the Defense Department describes as a virtual, centralized grand database." Even the recently passed U.S.A. Patriot Act, as frightening as it was, contained some limitation of the use of government

spying on private individuals.

Regardless of how Congress, the White House and most of the media camouflage these threats to the public's constitutional rights to privacy, violations of workers' protections and the unleashing of unrestrained corporate abuses, the DHS law clearly shows how the alleged threat of terrorism will be used to continue the imposition of an unaccountable government.

“Every time you use your credit card, buy a medical prescription, use the Internet or E-mail, etc. (your personal data) will go into what the Defense Department describes as a virtual, centralized grand database.”

~William Safire

Conservative extremists in both parties are charging ahead with other destructive actions against constitutional protections claiming that the November 5th elections gave them a mandate to do it. Dick Armey, the new House Majority leader and one of Texas extremists now in control in Washington, sarcastically told DHS opponents during the November 13 House debate, "Weren't you listening? The American people told you last week what they want!"

The weakness of the AFL-CIO became clear in the last elections and in their submission to this new law. The AFL-CIO Washington leadership is worried more about their return on investments made by their Investment Trust

Corporation and about cutting deals with the Bush Administration.

For example, The Washington Spectator reported that Douglas McCarron, president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, supports Bush's agenda hoping that the Administration will ignore charges against McCarron of manipulating stock sales at the labor movement's life insurance company at the expense of Union members.

Faced with these threats from the Bush team and the obvious collusion of the two major political parties, millions of Americans are searching for a meaningful alternative. They are realizing that the U.S. civil society must develop new creative ways to organize itself to stop this wave of domestic abuses by the White House, Congress and the corrupt political system from City Hall to Washington. One way to stop it is to follow the example of people throughout the world who are actively resisting the globalization of corporate controlled governments and the imposition of repressive laws like the DHS. Such organized resistance must develop at the grassroots and with honest spokespersons from their own neighborhoods and not those imposed by corrupt political machines, selfish corporations, religious institutions or any other group that has an economic, social or political interest in continuing the status quo.



Antonio C. Cabral is a San Antonio freelance writer. His essays are published in the U.S. and Mexico.