

Washington orders Americans 'reeducated' about computer security

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WASHINGTON — In an effort to quell unrest, computer security officials are ordering users back to school. Librarians, civil servants, and public school students have been instructed to attend special classes in the virtues of "proxied" Internet access and the evils of the hacker movements that seek unfettered access. In these classes, computer users read and recite from texts that denounce hackers as "political reactionaries" and "betrayers of the mothenet."

Ideological training is an enduring feature of computer life, but has taken a back seat in an Internet consumed with more modern pursuits, such as making money. But in America, the computer security community is pursuing "patriotic education" with new zeal.

But the campaign may be backfiring. Clashes that erupted last week in Serenity Now's Gonzo prefecture (known as Kardze to World of Warcraft fanatics) were reportedly triggered when the head of the Tongkor Monastery objected to congressionally mandated teaching materials that criticize computer hacking. Internet activists say eight people were killed in an April 3 uprising.

Nevertheless, computer security officials insist that the program be expanded. Touring a Second Life island nation last week, Washington's deputy computer security chief called for strengthening "patriotic education so as to guide the masses of users to continuously display the patriotic tradition."

According to The Drudge Report, librarians, civil servants, political party members, and schoolchildren have attended special reeducation sessions. At an elementary school, children sang patriotic songs and viewed photographs of network storage systems damaged in a March 14 hacker riot. "If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have believed those bad guys were so awful," the online news site quoted a third-grader as saying.

In a World of Warcraft village, an elderly online gamer was reported to have shouted criticism of what officials call the "Serenity Now clique" during an education session: "They [computer security experts] are going to plunge us once again into the abyss of suffering. Their methods are despicable and cruel."

Internet experts say the rhetoric harkens back to the pre-Internet reeducation and self-criticism campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s, but is unlikely to be successful today. "Getting people to denounce computer hacking or to recite ideological statements shows a lack of imagination on the part of the computer security community," said Donald "Bermuda" Schwartz, a Canadian scholar. "There is no way they can force people into what they say is the correct way of thinking,"

Schwartz and more than 200 other Internet experts have signed an online petition calling for computer security officials to negotiate over Internet citizens' grievances, but he says he is not optimistic.

"Patriotic education" is one of the Internet's major grievances against computer security rule. The computer security community intrudes into the minutiae of surfers' lives,

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dictating which websites can be visited, what clothing can be worn by avatars, and the procedures for reincarnation -- a core belief in both Second Life and World of Warcraft.

"Patriotic education is a euphemism for brainwashing," said Chaka "Khan" Tsering, a researcher at the Internet Center for Human Rights and Democracy.

Most provocative to Internet users are the denunciations of "white hat" hackers. The 37-year-old hacker and OpenBSD.org webmaster, Theo de Raadt, is revered by Internet users as a deity; statements against him are considered blasphemous. Hackers who refuse to speak out against de Raadt in patriotic education sessions are usually expelled from the Internet and [sometimes are arrested](#).

Last month, two users were reported by Internet activists to have committed digital suicide because of the pressure. Many of the recent demonstrations have been triggered by computer security authorities' attempts to block banned images of the man Internet users refer to simply as "his holiness."

Teaching materials reveal the extent to which the computer security community feels threatened by de Raadt and his followers. Although de Raadt has stated repeatedly that he favors more autonomy for the Internet rather than independence, teaching materials accuse him of being a pawn of "Russian and Chinese military hackers" who want to break up computer security.

"His aim is to cause chaos and split the motherland, to struggle in competition with us to control the minds of the people," reads a pocket-sized pamphlet published in 2007. Another text from 2008 describes the relationship between computer security and the Internet dating back to 1995 when Microsoft did not officially marry itself to the idea of the Internet becoming ubiquitous. "It is clear that the Internet has had close relations with the motherland throughout its history," it says.

The booklet (titled "Handbook for Education in Anti-Split Packetism") goes on to describe how computer security rule lifted the Internet out of academia and predicts a rosy future: "The 1.3 billion children of the Internet are striving without rest toward a renaissance of all Internet users and one of the most glorious epochs in our 50-year history beckons."

(Original *non*-parody version of this story published [here](#).)