

STUDS TERKEL, TERRORIST

No, I'm not really claiming that Studs Terkel was a terrorist.




But, after reading his FBI file, you get a renewed sense of what the FBI's files on Muslims and DOD's files on peace activists must look like. It's worth a gander, if only for a reminder of how paranoid—and susceptible to fear-mongers—our country gets when we begin to profile our citizens because of alleged associations. Among Terkel's suspicious ties include the National Lawyers Guild and Jewish women's organizations.

The CUNY NYC NewsService FOIAed Terkel's file after he passed away last year. Though the FBI just turned over 147 of 269 pages of his file.

The NewsService piece also reminds of Terkel's NYT op-ed written during the debate about amending FISA in 2007.

In 1978, with broad public support, Congress passed the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which placed national security investigations, including wiretapping, under a system of warrants approved by a special court. The law was not perfect, but as a result of its enactment and a series of subsequent federal laws, a generation of Americans has come to adulthood protected by a legal structure and a social compact making clear that government will not engage in unbridled, dragnet seizure of electronic communications.

The Bush administration, however, tore apart that carefully devised legal structure and social compact. To make matters worse, after its intrusive programs were exposed, the White House and the Senate Intelligence Committee proposed a bill that legitimized blanket



wiretapping without individual warrants. The legislation directly conflicts with the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution, requiring the government to obtain a warrant before reading the e-mail messages or listening to the telephone calls of its citizens, and to state with particularity where it intends to search and what it expects to find.

Compounding these wrongs, Congress is moving in a haphazard fashion to provide a “get out of jail free card” to the telephone companies that violated the rights of their subscribers. Some in Congress argue that this law-breaking is forgivable because it was done to help the government in a time of crisis. But it’s impossible for Congress to know the motivations of these companies or to know how the government will use the private information it received from them.

As we continue to wade through the EFF document dump of that legislative battle and engage on the current battle over PATRIOT, it’s worth listening to Studs Terkel once again.

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