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## **Internet switch-off threat to online pirates**

Ian Drury, Daily Mail

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Parents whose children illegally download music, games and films could have their internet access cut off under plans to tackle online piracy.

Lord Mandelson ordered the crackdown on illegal file-sharing after dining with the multimillionaire Hollywood mogul David Geffen during his holiday in Corfu.

The timing of the move will spark fresh accusations that the Business Secretary likes to do favours for his rich friends.

Under the proposals, individuals whose computers are persistently used for illegal file-sharing face having their internet connections suspended - even if they are not the ones doing the downloading.

*[See our guide to the government's proposals to tackle illegal downloads...](#)*

Critics branded it 'unworkable lunacy' that risked criminalising seven million Britons - one in 12 of the population - whose equipment is used for illicit downloading.

Parents who rely on the internet for everything from banking to business could have their connection severed if their children are caught secretly downloading music tracks illegally.

And individuals could also be blamed if unscrupulous neighbours tap into their unprotected Wi-Fi wireless internet connections to download copyrighted content without permission.

Only two months ago, Gordon Brown described internet access as 'an essential service as indispensable as electricity, gas and water'.

He spoke out after Lord Carter published the Digital Britain report, which recommended restricting only the speed of the worst offenders' broadband internet connections - making it difficult for them to download files. But in a U-turn yesterday, ministers set out measures to suspend wholly the internet accounts of users who persistently download music, films and TV programmes for nothing.

Lord Mandelson is said to have ordered officials to draw up the new regulations days after dinner with Mr Geffen, a long-time campaigner against internet piracy in the US.

Mr Geffen has a vested interest as he set up the DreamWorks film studio with Steven Spielberg and founded Asylum Records, Bob Dylan's label.

He dined with Lord Mandelson on August 7 at the Rothschild family villa on Corfu, while the Business Secretary was holidaying on the Greek island.

Liberal Democrat MP Norman Baker said: 'This is another Government policy which appears to have been decided at the soirees attended by Peter Mandelson and not through proper consultation.'

Under the scheme, unveiled by Digital Minister Stephen Timms, communications watchdog Ofcom will tell internet service providers which customers repeatedly break the law.

These ISPs will be forced to give the customers an initial written warning, ordering them to halt this activity or face sanctions, including suspension of their connections.

Tom Watson, one of Gordon Brown's closest allies who quit as digital minister in June, said: 'I'm disappointed with the announcement. It will lead to accusations that the Government has been captured by the big lobby operations of powerful rights-holders.'

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Larry Whitty, chairman of campaign group Consumer Focus, said cutting internet access was 'disproportionate' and 'undermines fundamental rights to a fair trial.' Jim Killock, of the digital campaigners Open Rights Group, said: 'This smacks of a knee-jerk reaction at a time when copyright infringement is reducing.'

Internet provider Talk Talk accused Lord Mandelson of 'caving in under pressure from powerful lobbyists'.

A spokesman said: 'This will not work. The evidence that is used to identify offenders is unreliable. . . and so will result in innocent customers being cut off.'

But Geoff Taylor, chief executive of the British Phonographic Industry, which represents the music industry, said: 'Digital piracy is a serious problem and a real threat to the UK's creative industries. This is a step forward.'