

Who rules America?

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President Barack Obama's defense of secret government programs to spy not only on the American people but also countless millions all over the world has been followed by threats from Director of National Intelligence James Clapper to prosecute those involved in leaking information about the massive surveillance operations.

In a statement issued Saturday, Clapper denounced the British *Guardian* and the *Washington Post* for publishing "reckless exposures" of programs run by the Pentagon-based National Security Agency (NSA). These programs spy on the US and world's population on a daily basis and capture hundreds of millions of Internet communications, including emails, chats, videos, photos and credit card receipts.

Reuters cited Justice Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation officials who said the government is expected to open a criminal investigation into the leaks. As far as the Obama administration is concerned, the crime is not the flagrantly unconstitutional invasion of the privacy rights of the American people, but the exposure of these acts before the public.

Obama's remarks last Friday in defense of the NSA programs, in which he characterized the media reports as "hype" and called pervasive state surveillance of the population a "modest encroachment" on the Bill of Rights, reflect a complete abandonment of any conception of democratic rights. This former professor of constitutional law articulates the outlook of a ruling class that has severed any serious connection to the constitutional framework upon which the United States was founded.

Obama presides over a country in which the president can—and does—unilaterally order the extra-judicial assassination of people all over the world, including US citizens; where entire cities, such as Boston, can be placed under de facto martial law; where the government seizes the phone records and emails of investigative journalists; where those who expose US war crimes, such as Private Bradley Manning, are tortured and prosecuted for treason;

where the president can order alleged terrorists to be detained indefinitely and without trial in military prisons.

The question posed by these developments is: Who rules America?

In defense of his violations of the Constitution, which he is his sworn to defend, Obama insists that Congress has been consulted and has given its approval. That is true. He also points accurately to the sanction provided by the courts.

Yet everyone knows that the American people have never been consulted and have been lied to and kept in the dark about the destruction of their democratic rights. Even the term "bourgeois democracy" becomes something of a misnomer for a political system in which the threadbare trappings of popular sovereignty are so wholly contradicted by the realities of political life.

The secret collaboration of the military, the intelligence and national security agencies, and gigantic corporations in the systematic and illegal surveillance of the American people reveals the true wielders of power in the United States. Telecommunications giants such as AT&T, Verizon and Sprint, and Internet companies such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook and Twitter, provide the military and the FBI and CIA with access to data on hundreds of millions of people that these state agencies have no legal right to possess.

Congress and both of the major political parties serve as rubber stamps for the confluence of the military, the intelligence apparatus and Wall Street that really runs the country. The so-called "Fourth Estate"—the mass media—functions shamelessly as an arm of this ruling troika.

The cowardice and duplicity of Congress, above all, the Democrats, and the subservience of the media, exhibited in their response to the exposure of the NSA spying programs, encourage the military and intelligence agencies to go even further in their drive toward dictatorship. Mark Udall, the Democratic senator presented as the most "outspoken" critic of the spying programs, began his interview Sunday on CNN's "State

of the Union” program by pledging his support to the “war on terror” and denouncing leaks of classified information.

Not a single major newspaper or media outlet has demanded an end to the spying, the closure of the NSA, the prosecution of officials responsible for the illegal spying, or impeachment proceedings against Obama, whose “high crimes and misdemeanors” in violation of the Constitution surpass anything committed by Nixon. The *New York Times* on Saturday published a front-page lead article headlined “Mining of Data is Called Critical to Fight Terror.” The article cited former intelligence officials to unabashedly defend the NSA surveillance programs.

The Obama administration itself, more than any previous US administration, embodies the consolidation of power by the military and the CIA in alliance with the financial elite. The ever-increasing power of what Eisenhower in 1961 called the “military-industrial complex” has found a certain consummation in the merging of the executive branch with the national security apparatus under Obama.

Obama’s personal background appears to have made him the ideal vehicle for this process. It is well known that after his graduation from college he worked for a year for Business International, whose founder acknowledged providing cover for CIA agents in several countries.

Obama’s personal biography, however, should not detract from the more basic social processes at work in the emergence of dictatorial forms of rule in the United States. No one can seriously deny today that the “war on terror” is and always was a war on the American people—a cover for imperialist war internationally and an unrelenting assault on democratic rights within the US.

The massive scale of the spying—targeting every man, woman and child in the country—raises the question: What are they afraid of?

The ruling class is haunted by the sense that it is socially and politically isolated, that the policies it is pursuing lack any serious base of support. Even as it escalates its assault on the conditions of the vast majority of the people—driven by the crisis of the capitalist system—the corporate-financial elite feels itself threatened by the consequences of the crisis. It knows that the financial house of cards it has constructed can come crashing down at almost any point, provoking revolutionary social upheavals.

But the ruling class has ultimately only one answer to this dilemma—violent repression. Hence the inexorable

buildup of the police powers of the state. They are directed not against terrorists, but against the working class.

No section of the political establishment and no official institution will fight the assault on democratic rights.

The Democratic Party and the so-called “liberal” establishment once again reveal that they have no serious commitment to democratic rights. They are joined by the coterie of left-liberal and pseudo-left forces, represented by the *Nation* magazine and the International Socialist Organization, which have remained largely silent on the latest exposure of Obama’s deeply reactionary and anti-democratic policies. Without the support these ostensibly “left,” in reality right-wing, groups provide Obama and the Democrats, it would not be possible for the state to mount such far-reaching attacks on democratic rights.

These rights, however, resonate deeply in the working class. They were achieved in the first place through revolutionary struggles. The fact that the ruling class today is determined to destroy them is an expression of the historical bankruptcy of American and world capitalism. The defense of these rights now falls to the working class.

What must be developed is an independent political movement of working people and youth. The defense of democratic rights is inseparable from a struggle against capitalism and the capitalist state. The key to the waging of this struggle is the building of the Socialist Equality Party as the new revolutionary leadership of the working class.



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