

What Edward Snowden has revealed

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Edward Snowden, the former CIA information technology employee and contractor for the National Security Agency (NSA), has performed an immense service to the people of the United States and the world by lifting the veil on the military-intelligence spying apparatus, which operates in secrecy and in violation of the most basic constitutional rights.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on workers around the world to come to the defense of Snowden, who is now the subject of a ferocious assault by the American state.

The whistleblower quite justifiably fears for his safety. The Obama administration has launched a criminal investigation; leading political figures, both Democratic and Republican, have denounced his actions as “treason;” and political pundits have called for his execution. He is currently the subject of an intense global manhunt, as the American government seeks his capture and extradition.

Having revealed himself as the leaker in an extensive interview with the *Guardian* newspaper’s Glenn Greenwald, Snowden has fled the Hong Kong hotel where he had been staying for three weeks. “I could be rendered by the CIA. I could have people come after me,” he told Greenwald, adding he hoped that by coming out it would be “harder for them to get dirty.”

In his interview with Greenwald, Snowden spoke powerfully and eloquently of the “architecture of oppression” that goes beyond even that which has been revealed in the documents released so far.

There is no constituency for democracy within the American ruling class or its political apparatus. However, Snowden’s comments and actions, and the powerful support he has received from ordinary Americans, demonstrate that there is a constituency for democracy in the American population.

In revealing the spying programs, Snowden says he was motivated by a desire to inform the American

people about what is taking place. “It’s important to send a message to the government that people will not be intimidated,” he declared. “I don’t want to live in a society that does these sorts of things,” he added. “I do not want to live in a world where everything I do and say is recorded.”

The fury with which the political and media establishment has responded to the leaks reveals its justifiable concern that with each new revelation, the legitimacy of the American government and the entire state apparatus is further undermined—at home and abroad. The ruling class is driving toward a police state, but it does not yet have one. It fears for the stability of its rule.

Snowden’s actions are courageous and principled, but historical experience has demonstrated that the defense of democracy is not possible simply through individual actions. It requires a social movement of the working class, based on an understanding that the crisis of democracy is rooted in the class structure of American and world capitalism.

On the one side stands the financial aristocracy, which, in its social instincts and political outlook, is authoritarian. It looks on the population as a whole as a hostile force, and every citizen as a potential enemy. And with good reason. The corporate and financial elite is well aware that the policies it is pursuing are deeply unpopular.

The aim is to intimidate and blackmail an entire society. As Snowden noted, after the state has gathered, on a permanent basis, data from everyone, “You simply have to eventually fall under suspicion from somebody, even by a wrong call. And then they can use this system to go back in time and scrutinize every decision you’ve ever made, every friend you’ve ever discussed something with.”

Such methods will be employed against any and all political opposition. With the information it has already

assembled, the government can readily construct a detailed social and political profile of nearly every individual in the United States.

It is not only the American working class that is a target. According to the “Boundless Informant” data-mining tool, some 97 billion pieces of intelligence were gathered worldwide from one NSA spying program in March 2013 alone. In addition to the 3 billion pieces of intelligence from within the US, there were 14 billion from Iran, 13.5 billion from Pakistan, 12.7 billion from Jordan, 7.6 billion from Egypt, 6.3 billion from India, and 3 billion from Europe.

The financial aristocracy controls the entire political establishment—from the Obama administration and both political parties, to Congress and the courts. In defending the spying programs—along with other antidemocratic measures, including the claimed right to assassinate US citizens without due process—Obama has repeatedly insisted that he is not alone, that Congress has been informed. And this is true.

For its part, the corporate-controlled media functions as an auxiliary arm of the state. It is left to individuals like Snowden to do what they can to reveal government criminality because the mass media not only refuses to do so, but actively seeks to prevent information from getting to the American people.

In the wake of the Snowden revelations, the media has played its inimitable swinish role. “Traitor or hero?” was the question that dominated the news coverage, with the vapid talking heads and CIA assets who pass for commentators generally coming down on the side of “traitor.”

In its response to Snowden, the media is reprising its reaction to the documents published by WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange, as a result of the actions of Private Bradley Manning. Manning is currently facing prosecution for “aiding the enemy” by revealing to the people of America and the world the crimes of the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US media—including the *New York Times* and its former executive editor, Bill Keller—responded to the WikiLeaks revelations with a combination of slander, vilification and character assassination.

Counterpoised to this financial aristocracy and its agencies stands the working class, with its powerful democratic traditions. There is a growing disquiet over the attack on democratic rights, linked to the anger over

constant war abroad and social reaction within the United States.

These spying programs are carried out in secret precisely because the ruling class knows it lacks a broad base of support. As Snowden noted in his interview, the documents reveal that “the NSA [and other government officials] routinely lie in response to congressional inquiries about the scope of surveillance in America.” The liar-in-chief is Obama himself.

A government of lies and secrecy is necessary precisely because the social interests that the state represents are in irreconcilable conflict with those of the vast majority of the population. Such a social system is not compatible with democratic forms of rule.

The power of the financial aristocracy, the military-intelligence apparatus and their political institutions can be overcome, but this is possible only through mass social struggle. The defense of Snowden and of democratic rights must be connected to the independent mobilization of the working class in the fight for socialism.



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