Detroit workers speak out against NSA spying

David Brown
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Through the efforts of whistleblower Edward Snowden, the American people have gained a partial insight into the massive spying operations carried out by the US government.

In response to the revelations of illegal and unconstitutional activities, members of Congress have called Snowden a traitor, guilty of capital crimes. The Obama administration is preparing charges and extradition proceedings.

Campaigners in Detroit spoke to workers at the Chrysler Warren Stamping auto plant and at the Rosa Parks Transit Center about the US government surveillance programs and the attack on democratic rights. They distributed copies of the WSWS perspective, "Defend Edward Snowden!"

At Warren Stamping, one worker said, "I'm glad he came out, everyone knew [government spying] was happening, but now we have proof. They say he put peoples' lives in danger, but they don't show it. There are so many secrets, and the public is kept in the dark. It's unbelievable.

"Really it's his life that's in danger. They probably want to kill him; he had to flee to China."

A younger woman added, "It's nothing new, just a bunch of crooks trying to dictate everything."

Detroit is currently subject to the dictates of Kevyn Orr, the emergency financial manager who has the authority to unilaterally abrogate city workers' contracts and privatize city services. Orr has also threatened to sell off some of the collection in the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA).

After a public meeting held by the SEP to defend the DIA, a retiree spoke on the surveillance.

"It isn't like we didn't know that Big Brother was listening in, but to see the scale…

"Our constitutional rights have become a sham. The whole thing is a lie. It was Benjamin Franklin who said, 'He who sacrifices freedom for security deserves neither.' Under the guise of hunting terrorists, they can ruin political enemies. The government claims you have liberties, but when people try to exercise those liberties, they crack down."

Two members of the SEP also spoke to commuters waiting for their buses at Rosa Parks transit terminal in Detroit.

They met an overwhelmingly positive response from the large crowds at the station, who nearly unanimously agreed that Edward Snowden was the hero and the NSA the villain of the recent wiretapping scandal.

The majority of those interviewed rejected out of hand the claim that the NSA was spying on hundreds of millions of Americans in an attempt to catch terrorists.

Workers were angered by the gross invasion of their privacy and violation of their rights. "And what are they going to do to the NSA?" one worker asked, suggesting the agency ought to be punished. The interviewees were eager to vent their frustration and share their opinions.

Che Condea and Catherine, two sisters who are street vendors in downtown Detroit, were incensed that the US government had labeled Snowden a "snitch" and a traitor. "The government has no right to our private conversations," said Che. She was also angered that an unelected emergency manager had been given dictatorial control over the city of Detroit. "When people come to realize," she said, "they'll fight back."

Nanna, retired, told the WSWS that "the government thinks they can get any goddamn thing they want," referring to NSA surveillance of personal information, "therefore they can get you." She said she believes that the government is after Snowden simply because he told the truth. "Leave the man alone," she added.

Barbara, who was waiting for a bus back home, first told us that Snowden "was wrong to do that." Her impression of his actions was mistaken, however, and when she realized that it was not Snowden himself, but

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the NSA who had collected information on Americans, she adamantly rejected the idea that he was to blame. But, she added, “they’re gonna kill him.”

Pam works as a housekeeper. Discussion of NSA wiretapping led the conversation to a consideration of social unrest and revolution. She responded with enthusiasm to the idea of a “workers’ council to govern the city” of Detroit. “Throw them all out and start again,” she said, referring to Mayor Bing, Kevyn Orr, and the City Council.

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