

Edward Snowden: Planet without a visa

3 July 2013

Edward Snowden, the National Security Agency contractor who courageously exposed secret and unconstitutional US spying programs targeting millions of people in the US and around the world, is now unable to find a single government prepared to grant him the democratic right of asylum.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” This centuries-old right has been codified in numerous international treaties.

Snowden unquestionably deserves this right. He confronts two espionage charges carrying a possible death sentence for the sole “crime” of exposing the real crimes of systematic spying by the US government against the people of the United States and the world.

His prospects for a fair trial in the US have been irrevocably aborted by the slander campaign of the media and the government, branding him a traitor and spy. The government that seeks his extradition has arrogated to itself the right to summarily execute anyone it deems an enemy of the state, a “right” that it has exercised against at least four American citizens by means of drone missile strikes. As for the media, it has deliberately buried the revelations of wholesale domestic and international spying in order to concentrate on Snowden’s alleged “crimes.”

For the past 11 days, Snowden has been trapped in the transit zone of Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport, allowed neither to enter Russia nor proceed on to any other country. The Obama administration has mounted an international intimidation campaign against governments potentially contemplating giving him asylum.

Denouncing the US government’s actions, Snowden declared: “In the end, the Obama administration is not afraid of whistleblowers like me, Bradley Manning or Thomas Drake. We are stateless, imprisoned, or powerless. No, the Obama administration is afraid of

you. It is afraid of an informed, angry public demanding the constitutional government it was promised—and it should be.” Such fear is by no means unique to the Obama administration.

While Snowden’s actions have met with support and gratitude from workers and young people in the US and across the planet, that is not the case with the governments that rule them. All of them bow to the bullying from Washington. Like the US government, they defend wealthy ruling classes under conditions of ever-widening social inequality, and like Washington, they fear that their conspiracies against their own people will be exposed to the light of day.

Russian President Vladimir Putin spelled this out on Monday, announcing that Snowden would be allowed to stay in Russia only if he agreed to “cease his work aimed at inflicting damage to our American partners.” The former KGB agent acknowledged that the word used to describe the US government sounded “strange... from my lips.”

Whatever the geopolitical conflicts between Moscow and Washington, however, both governments represent rapacious capitalist ruling strata and are united in their fear of state crimes being exposed to their respective working populations.

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Snowden swiftly rejected Putin’s “offer,” which would have made him a political prisoner of the Kremlin oligarchy, and withdrew his asylum application. His action made clear his determination to continue exposing the illegal operations of the US government and at the same time underscored the fraud of the espionage charges brought against him.

Of the other 20 some governments to which Snowden submitted applications for asylum, many summarily rejected his request on technical grounds, while others, like the Brazilian Workers Party administration of Dilma Rousseff, merely announced they weren’t even

going to consider it. The government of Poland bluntly stated that its asylum policy required that granting this democratic right had to serve “national interests,” a principle that could be embraced by any police-state dictatorship.

Perhaps most extraordinary is the reaction of Western European governments, which have denounced the revelations of US spying on them and the European Union as outrageous and Orwellian, and have threatened to abort a free trade agreement with the US in retaliation. Yet none of them is prepared to offer asylum to Snowden, the individual who exposed these crimes.

They are prepared to have him sent back to face a rigged trial by the government that carried out the offenses they have denounced. No doubt a major consideration in the decision to reject Snowden’s right to asylum is concern that confidential material in his possession will implicate their own governments in similar crimes.

While Snowden has sought asylum from the governments of the so-called Latin American “left,” as yet none have provided it. Their leaders have praised his courage—attempting to appeal to the popular support he enjoys among their own people—but have not shown the ability to summon one one-hundredth of the same courage themselves in the face of pressures and threats from US imperialism.

Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa, after initially indicating his government’s willingness to grant Snowden asylum, took a personal phone call from US Vice President Joseph Biden last week and quickly changed his tune.

He condemned the London Ecuadorean consul’s decision to grant Snowden a safe-conduct pass to leave Hong Kong as a “mistake” for which there would be “consequences.” He also asserted that his government could not consider an asylum request until the ex-NSA contractor reached Ecuadorean soil—currently an impossibility with his US passport revoked, the Ecuadorean pass rescinded, and no other travel documents at hand.

Correa said that Snowden “really could have broken North American laws” and declared himself “very respectful of other countries and their laws.” He added, “I believe that someone who breaks the law must assume his responsibilities.”

Then there are Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and Bolivia’s Evo Morales, both of whom were in Moscow this week for a meeting of gas-producing nations. While they have held out the possibility of granting Snowden asylum, either of them could have flown Snowden out on their presidential jets, but declined to do so.

Maduro, who has initiated a policy of “normalization” of relations with Washington and accommodation with Venezuela’s billionaires, voiced the opinion that Snowden should receive “international protection,” but denied that his government had received an asylum request, despite the report from WikiLeaks that one had been submitted. Morales made similar empty statements of sympathy for Snowden, while likewise claiming not to have received the request filed for political asylum.

Under conditions where no government is interested in upholding Edward Snowden’s right to political asylum, a right that has been all but repudiated in practice across the planet, his defense can and must be taken up by working people, youth and students in the US and around the world. This must include the demand in every country that he be granted asylum now.

The defense of Snowden, as well as others targeted by US imperialism for exposing its crimes, including Julian Assange and Private Bradley Manning, must serve as the starting point for a worldwide offensive in defense of democratic rights and against the capitalist profit system, the source of war, social inequality and the drive toward police-state dictatorship.

Bill Van Auken

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The World Socialist Web Site and Socialist Equality Party are waging a campaign to defend Edward Snowden. For more information and to get involved, click here.



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