

Indian Stalinist party refuses to defend Snowden

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The Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, has refused to defend Edward Snowden, the American whistleblower who is being persecuted by the Obama administration for exposing the National Security Agency's (NSA) massive illegal spying operations.

Snowden is currently trapped in the transit area in Moscow airport. The Congress-led government in India is among the countries that have turned down his request for asylum.

The CPM, which at times claims to be "left" and "socialist," is thoroughly integrated into the Indian political establishment and parliamentary system as a defender of the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie. The party issued two brief Political Bureau statements on the implications of Snowden's revelations but failed to say a word about the fate of Snowden himself.

The first statement on July 2 criticised Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid for justifying US spying operations. "The government should have strongly protested against such surveillance and bugging" and should "immediately lodge a strong protest against the US snooping activities and demand its halt forthwith," it stated.

However, apart from acknowledging that Snowden exposed the NSA's spying, the statement did not call for the defence of this courageous young man, who faces prosecution on espionage charges that will lead to heavy prison terms or the death penalty. The CPM has been completely silent on the Indian government's refusal to grant asylum to him.

The purpose of the CPM's criticisms of US spying operations is not to warn the working class about the implications of the buildup of such police-state measures in the US and around the world, including India. Rather the CPM is giving voice to the concerns

of sections of the Indian ruling class that its national security interests are being compromised. Its statement criticised the Indian foreign minister "who is not worried that the Indian embassy in Washington is bugged by the US intelligence agency."

In a second statement on July 4, the CPM denounced the US and European governments for forcing down the plane of the Bolivian President Evo Morales last week on suspicion that Snowden was on board, saying it was "flagrant violation of international law." But again, the CPM made no comment on Snowden himself and did not call for his defence.

The CPM is also silent on the Indian government's own vast electronic spying operations, known as the Central Monitoring System. This gives the Indian intelligence agencies unchecked access to all the country's landline, mobile telephone and Internet traffic.

Like the Obama administration, the Indian government justifies its surveillance system under the pretext of "war on terror." Following the 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai that killed 166 people, the government introduced legislation to "intercept, monitor or decrypt" any information "generated, transmitted, received, or stored in any computer resource," on vague and sweeping grounds of national security and public order.

The CPM's limited criticism of US spying operations and its tacit support for India's electronic surveillance both flow from its full commitment to defend the Indian state apparatus. A CPM-led coalition formed the state governments in West Bengal for 34 consecutive years and Kerala for several terms until defeated in 2011. These state administrations were notorious for ruthlessly suppressing opposition from workers, youth and peasants to their pro-market policies.

The CPM supported the central government's military crackdown on Maoist guerrillas in late 2009, codenamed "Operation Green Hunt." The aim of the operation was to open up the land and resources of oppressed and highly marginalised tribal people, who form the social base of the guerrilla movement, to big business. The CPM-led government in West Bengal deployed large numbers of armed police to support Indian troops involved in the operation.

In an article in its English-language weekly, *People's Democracy*, on June 23, the CPM also criticised the Indian government's strategic partnership with the US. The article did not condemn the anti-democratic character of the NSA's surveillance activities, but rather the fact that India had no access to the US intelligence.

The CPM noted: "The US shares this data with some its partners—the UK and Israel being the obvious examples... For the rest, such as India, the US asks for court orders and strict adherence to the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT). So much for India cosyng up to the US and becoming its strategic partner."

CPM's reservations about the strategic partnership reflect the concerns of sections of the Indian ruling class that India gains little from the arrangement, but risks being drawn into the US confrontation with China, to the detriment of India's economic and strategic interests. It advocates a more "balanced" line in foreign policies, including better relations with countries such as Russia and China, while maintaining ties with the US.

The *People's Democracy* article argued that the Internet had to be governed in "a truly multilateral way in which peoples' rights are protected" as opposed to a system "under a license from the US Department of Commerce." This is simply an appeal for the Indian ruling class to have a greater stake in the global monitoring and restriction of the operations of the Internet.

The CPM's refusal to defend Snowden is entirely in line with its support for the Indian state apparatus and its police-state mechanisms. It would undoubtedly react with deep hostility to any whistleblower who exposed the anti-democratic operations of the Indian intelligence services. Its defence of Indian "national interests" is matched by its total contempt for the basic democratic rights of the working class and oppressed masses.



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