

French Socialist Party government denies Snowden asylum, backs Internet spying

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France's Socialist Party (PS) government is backing Washington's campaign to isolate and capture Edward Snowden. Since denying over-flight rights to Bolivian President Evo Morales on suspicion that he was transporting Snowden to Bolivia last Tuesday, it has denied Snowden asylum and defended its own massive Internet spying program, which is similar to the US programs Snowden revealed.

The Electromagnetic-Origin Surveillance in France (ROEF) program has for years allowed France's Directorate General of Exterior Security (DGSE) to systematically collect and store signals sent by computers and cell phones, including calls and Facebook and Twitter posts. As in US National Security Agency (NSA) programs, this allows it to automatically compile profiles of every citizen based on the metadata of calls and Internet posts. Last week, *Le Monde* wrote that this program was "perfectly illegal, or a-legal," citing intelligence sources.

While it oversees the construction of the surveillance infrastructure of a police state within France, the PS government is trampling on the democratic right of asylum. French President François Hollande declined to even take a public position on Snowden's asylum request, leaving it to Interior Ministry officials to announce that it had been denied.

The announcement said Snowden "faces charges. It continued: "If by chance, he entered onto our territory, the police would be obligated to arrest him, as we have received an extradition request from the United States."

The Interior Ministry admitted that Snowden's revelations of US Internet spying "raise issues," as they are directed at French and international targets as well as the American people. However, it promptly dismissed the question, cynically stating, "Paris has asked for explanations from the United States."

This represents an extraordinary and anti-democratic refusal of Snowden's right to asylum. Snowden would likely be thrown into solitary confinement or face the death penalty on treason charges were he to return to the United States, even though it is his accusers, and not Snowden, who have committed a crime. Snowden has himself rendered a service to the public by exposing the criminal intelligence operations inside the American state.

To justify its action, France's Interior Ministry claimed, "The United States are an allied country, a democracy with an independent justice system ... We must leave the United States to decide this issue."

This signifies that the French government treats the right to asylum not as a democratic right, but as an option that it grants or refuses based on its foreign policy interests.

In the meantime, the PS government has come to the defense of the ROEF Internet spying database program. Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault's staff said that *Le Monde*'s reports were incorrect because several intelligence services besides the DGSE are actively gathering intelligence. They added that "all these intercepts are governed by the 1991 law," to dispute the claims of intelligence officials who told *Le Monde* that the program was not subject to legal scrutiny.

In fact, examining the statements of PS officials themselves makes clear that, whatever intelligence agencies are involved in running the program, it is indeed a program directed against the French and world population, operating without any effective legal oversight.

On July 4, PS Deputy Jean-Jacques Urvoas, who sits on the National Assembly's intelligence committee, issued a post explaining the program while attempting to hide its significance.

He first confirmed the bulk of the *Le* revelations: “Our services have developed shared interception tools to gather Internet flows in the context of the 1991 law on security intercepts ... ROEF naturally constitutes a major source of information due to the growth of new communications technology. It covers satellite and Internet intercepts. Due to the massive character of the investment required and encouraged by the 2008 and 2013 White Papers [on defense], the DGSE was designated as the lead agency in the matter.”

He tried to reassure the public by asserting that French citizens could be spied upon only with the “authorization of the National Commission to Control Security Intercepts (CNCIS),” a body staffed by several parliamentarians, including Urvoas.

Urvoas’ own comments undermined the claim that the French population is protected from the intelligence services by the legal oversight of a vigilant parliament. He continued, “The parliament is not able to investigate in detail the reality of the actions of the intelligence services, and must be content with knowledge of general and budgetary elements.”

In reality, the ROEF operates without any effective oversight as a gigantic spying machine—a function which belies the claims that it is being developed purely in the context of a struggle against terrorism. The enemy it is watching does not consist of Al Qaeda, which is working with French foreign policy in such areas as the war in Syria, but of the French and world population.

One aspect of the 1991 law does, however, give some indication of the use to which the ROEF will be put: surveillance and suppression of political opposition in the working class.

The 1991 law and subsequent additions to it in 2004 and 2006 base themselves on the law of January 10, 1936—which was initially passed to ban fascist organizations amid the rise of French fascism in the mid-1930s.

The law—subsequently amended by the fascist Vichy regime during the Nazi Occupation and then modified again at the Liberation—served as the basis for banning various left-wing groups in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Organizations that were banned included independence movements directed against French imperialism in countries such as Algeria and

Madagascar, as well as the ~~the~~ International Communist Organization, which at the time was the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, which publishes the WSWs.



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