Hands off Edward Snowden!

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The Obama administration and the US military and intelligence apparatus are waging an ever more aggressive worldwide campaign to capture Edward Snowden. At the same time, and undoubtedly in response to intensifying pressure from Washington, Russian authorities are sending increasingly blunt signals that they want the departure of the former National Security Agency contractor from the Moscow international airport where he has been trapped for the last two weeks.

The life of Snowden is in imminent danger. The vindictive character of Washington's international manhunt has intensified with the mounting series of disclosures exposing massive unconstitutional and illegal spying on not only American citizens, but peoples and governments all over the world, from Western Europe to Brazil.

The international bullying and gangsterism of the Obama administration have only made more convincing the case for Edward Snowden's unconditional right to asylum against the persecution that he faces at the hands of the US government.

This was made abundantly clear with the forcing down last week of the airplane carrying Bolivia's President Evo Morales by several European powers acting at the behest of the US Central Intelligence Agency. The rationale for this extraordinary action—tantamount to an act of war—was supposedly the suspicion that Snowden was aboard the aircraft.

It is not clear whether such suspicions actually existed, or whether Washington decided to make an example of Morales for saying that Snowden deserved asylum and Bolivia was prepared to give it, and thereby send a message to any head of state contemplating such action.

One thing is certain, if the US government was willing to risk the life of the Bolivian president by aborting his flight plan as his plane was in midair and running low on fuel, it is obviously prepared to murder Snowden himself to stop his disclosures.

The US political establishment has followed up on the outrage against Morales with a campaign of threats and intimidation against other governments over the Snowden case.

In a show of bipartisan unity on the persecution of Snowden, leading members of both parties used Sunday television news interviews to wave a big stick in the direction of Latin America, echoing the long and criminal history of imperialist aggression in the region.

Congressman Mike Rogers, the Republican chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, declared: "This is serious business. Those Latin American countries that enjoy certain trade benefits with the United States, we ought to look at all of that, to send a very clear message that we will not put up with this kind of behavior."

Similarly, Senator Robert Menendez, the Democratic chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, threatened that the granting of asylum to Snowden by any country "is going to put them directly against the US, and they need to know that."

The gangsterism of the American government contrasts sharply with the principled actions of Snowden himself. In the second installment of an interview recorded with Snowden last month and released by the *Guardian* newspaper, the former NSA contractor explained his actions from the standpoint of his own political evolution, from believing in the "nobility" of US pretensions that it was acting to "free oppressed people overseas" to recognizing that "we were actually involved in misleading the public … in order to create a mindset in the global consciousness."

Snowden spoke for millions of people around the world in saying: "I don't want to live in a world where everything that I say, everything that I do, everyone I talk to, every expression of creativity or love or friendship is recorded. And that's not something I'm

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willing to build and it's not something I'm willing to live under."

He further explained that he had waited for "our leadership" to "correct the excesses of government" but had "seen that that's not occurring, in fact we're compounding the excesses of prior governments and making it worse and more invasive and no one is really standing to stop it."

Expressed here are not just the thoughts of a single individual, but rather the life experiences of an entire generation that came of age politically in the context of Washington's "global war on terror" and saw the launching of wars of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan, whose victims numbered in the millions, and the orchestration of torture and criminality from the White House.

The crimes carried out under the Bush administration have only deepened under Obama, the supposed champion of hope and change, who has overseen a global drone assassination program, the vast expansion of illegal spying and the launching of fresh wars of aggression in Libya and Syria.

The result is that millions of young people are disillusioned with and actively hostile to both big business parties and the entire political and economic setup in the US, which is dedicated to defending the interests of a financial oligarchy against those of working people, the vast majority of the population.

The hysteria and vindictiveness of the manhunt against Snowden reflects a deep fear within the ruling establishment not just of Snowden, but of ever larger numbers of workers, youth and students who share his outlook.

It is within these broad layers of the population, where Snowden enjoys powerful popular support, that his only real defense lies. It cannot be left in the hands of the bourgeois nationalist governments in Latin America, which seek their own means of accommodating US imperialism and furthering the interests of their own ruling classes, nor in those of Vladimir Putin's corrupt regime of the Russian oligarchy in Moscow.

The working class in the US and every other country constitutes the only genuine constituency for the defense of democratic rights. It alone can mount a viable opposition to the police state measures that are embraced by wealthy ruling layers in the US and around the world to defend a system characterized by vast social inequality, economic exploitation and political oppression.

Mass support must be mobilized in workplaces, schools and neighborhoods in the US and around the world around the demand "Hands off Edward Snowden!" His defense must be coupled with that of Private Bradley Mannning and Julian Assange, who are like him facing state persecution for exposing the crimes of US imperialism, and turned into the spearhead for a struggle in defense of democratic rights and against the capitalist profit system that gives rise to war and the threat of dictatorship.

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