

Australian workers and youth express support for Edward Snowden

Our correspondents

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Young people and workers have responded strongly over the past week to the Socialist Equality Party's campaigns in defence of Edward Snowden, the former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor who revealed the US government's illegal electronic spying operations on millions of American citizens and people around the world.

The Obama administration has initiated an international witch-hunt against the whistleblower, cancelling his passport, charging him with espionage and pressuring countries to deny him asylum. Snowden remains trapped at Sheremetyevo airport in Moscow, where he has been for over three weeks.

As part of the *World Socialist Web Site*'s international defence campaign, SEP election candidates and supporters spoke to workers and young people at shopping centres in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane and outside cinemas screening *We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks*, a recently released US documentary that amounts to a political hatchet job against Julian Assange, the founder of the WikiLeaks whistleblower organisation.

Despite receiving little serious coverage in the Australia media, those who spoke with the SEP were alarmed about the magnitude of the US spying and its disturbing implications for democratic rights.

Jack Okeby, a 15-year-old high school student in Sydney, said the US surveillance operation was "disgusting." While the US claimed to stand for democratic rights, he said, "the way that it's treating Snowden, like he's some kind of criminal, really shows how hypocritical and how fast it has gone back on its own constitution."

By charging Snowden with "giving information to the enemy," the US government implied that "the public is the enemy in themselves," Okeby said. "Previously the

government shut down things like communist parties, as they nearly did in Australia, but now, because of the Internet, they can't just shut down a party and block that idea from reaching the people. And that's a possible reason why they are attempting to spy on the public on such a massive scale."

Sydney retail worker **Roydon Shaw**, 28, denounced the US government attacks on Snowden. He was not surprised that "governments are doing illegal acts to keep their eyes on us." He added: "I think it's absolute rubbish the way they exaggerate the threat of terrorism and then make everyone guilty by association because we live on the same planet as a potential terrorist."

Shaw commented: "We should be told that if we want to use certain facilities, they're going to be bugged. You wouldn't let someone go through your mail box, so why would you let them search your emails?" He explained: "It just seems as a people we are tricked into thinking that democracy is freedom, but we don't have a democratic system. We have a two-choice party. That's not democracy because you can't get representation if you don't follow either of the two agendas."

Judy Scott, a Sydney writer, voiced her support for Snowden and WikiLeaks. "The fact is if Assange and Snowden are to be arrested and jailed, so should the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*. It's always been illogical and that's why there are huge numbers of people who support them, they're seen as heroes."

In Brisbane, **Krishna**, a newly-arrived Indian IT worker, said: "I may not be a direct victim of the government, but still it concerns me that there may be other victims who are directly impacted by this surveillance. The purpose is to control the normal citizens, the ordinary people. Governments start little by little, controlling at the smallest level until finally

they control at the biggest level and the highest level, against all your rights.”

Krishna explained: “If people were happy and peaceful everywhere, and governments were not going for war, then governments would not feel the need to control people. If all the working class had jobs, money, medical insurance, education, then they would be happy and no government control would be attempted.”

In Melbourne, **June Ryan** said: “I’m very concerned about Edward Snowden—absolutely. He and Julian Assange—anyone who blows whistles and stands up like that—are in big danger for what they’ve done... People in power don’t trust the majority of people. They want to rule the roost... they represent vested interests and they’re starting to panic, because people are becoming more vocal.

“[T]he articles in the media on Assange are all on personalities, not on substance. That is the establishment way of covering up. They want you to stay dumb. They talk about people being apathetic, but they want you apathetic. People I know are waking up to the fact that the real criminals are the ones preferring charges. It is upside down. It’s wrong.”

Dylan Morris, a Melbourne psychology student, said: “I think it is important that young people pay attention to what is being exposed by Snowden. I think it is fantastic. I repost all that he says. I am reading everything he exposes.”

Referring to the grounding by Spain, Portugal, Italy and France of the Bolivian president’s jet at the behest of the US government, Morris said, “I was shocked when America stopped the plane from Moscow going to South America. I thought it was international airspace. What authority does America have to do that to intervene in a country’s national sovereignty? They are head hunting—the US are just bullies.”

Mert Coleman, a retired worker holidaying from Ireland, said Snowden “has done a great service to the country and to the rest of the world by highlighting this. Maybe the Americans don’t agree with that, but we are all concerned about Big Brother prying into our private affairs.”

John Benn, a former teacher, said Snowden was “showing how the government is betraying its own people... What the hell are they doing? They say that other countries are doing the same thing but I just see

the size of the US effort and it seems unreasonable.”

Benn commented: “I’m surprised that Obama is the president at the time this is occurring. I’m surprised at their use of drones. I’m surprised that Guantanamo Bay is still in use, that torture still seems to be going on. It just seems to be the use of repression. It is also repression against other countries. It’s clear that other governments won’t help Snowden because they fear America... These tactics leave me completely gob smacked.”

Aaron, a WSWS reader from Western Australia, emailed to express his support for Snowden. “I believe any arguments indicating that spying on this level is necessary to counter terrorism and protect the general public are absolutely phony. The government does not need to—and should not—collect information on its population. Anyone with any interest or concern about Snowden and the information he has revealed should learn as much as possible about what is really happening and read the articles on wsws.org. This is a very serious situation which needs to be followed.”

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