

US Congress defends the methods of a police state

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The chief benefit of the vote by the US House of Representatives Wednesday—on an amendment to the Defense Department appropriations bill that would have placed limited restrictions on wholesale domestic spying by the National Security Agency—is its public confirmation that the majority of the US Congress supports a police state in America.

The legislative body that was referred to in a long-gone era as “the people’s house” stands exposed as an impotent appendage of the US military and intelligence apparatus that dominates the American state. Its members are bought and paid for by the financial and corporate interests that the massive surveillance against the American people and related illegal and unconstitutional repressive measures are meant to defend.

That the amendment even came to a vote in the House is a distorted reflection of the massive and growing hostility of the majority of the US population to these measures. A *Washington Post*-ABC News poll released Wednesday found that nearly three quarters of the American people believe that the NSA spying operation constitutes an infringement on privacy rights enshrined in the Constitution’s Fourth Amendment protection against unwarranted search and seizure.

Equally revealing, more than half held the view that the domestic spying operations either make no difference or make the US less safe against terrorism, the pretext and universal bogeyman that is trotted out by the government whenever its criminal conspiracies are challenged.

After nearly a dozen years, this bipartisan scaremongering has clearly worn thin with the American public. Not so with official Washington, however, as the Obama administration and both the Democratic and Republican House leaderships warned

darkly that halting the indiscriminate collection of telephone data on every American would render the country vulnerable to attack.

The vote provided the usual profiles in duplicity and cowardice, with the House leaderships of both parties marshaling the majority—134 Republicans and 83 Democrats—needed to defeat the amendment, while allowing those who have more to fear in terms of voter retribution to cast “aye” ballots or abstain.

The amendment would have de-funded just one of the NSA spying operations exposed by the NSA contractor turned whistleblower, Edward Snowden. It involves the collection of so-called “metadata” that allows the government to intercept and store the records on nearly every phone call made in the US. It would have required that the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act court—which just last week renewed its authorization of the wholesale data collection—limit such spying to individuals under investigation.

In advance of the vote, the head of the NSA, Gen. Keith Alexander, was dispatched to Capitol Hill for a closed-door session with members of Congress, who were admonished that the contents of his remarks were “top secret.”

The Obama White House issued a statement worthy of Orwell’s “Ministry of Truth,” declaring that, “In light of the recent unauthorized disclosures, the President has said that he welcomes a debate about how best to simultaneously safeguard both our national security and the privacy of our citizens.” It went on to describe the House amendment as a “blunt approach” that was “not the product of an informed, open, or deliberative process.”

Indeed, the president is so delighted about a “debate” on the NSA’s illegal spying that his administration is waging an international manhunt and campaign of

worldwide bullying to capture the man who made this debate possible, Snowden, and put him on trial for his life as a spy and traitor.

The day after the House vote, the 30-member, Democratic-led Senate Appropriations Committee voted unanimously to require that trade and other sanctions be imposed against any country that offers Edward Snowden political asylum. By comparison, the recent poll showed a clear majority of Americans opposed to any such sanctions.

As for the talk of a “blunt approach” and lack of “an informed, open or deliberative process,” whom do they think they are kidding? This is a government that has been “bluntly” and secretly collecting wholesale data on every American citizen, shredding core constitutional rights without the least semblance of “an informed, open or deliberative process.”

Without Snowden’s leaking of classified NSA documents, there would have been no vote, no debate and no public information whatsoever on the NSA’s massive data-mining operation and other domestic spying programs.

This is not because Congress was kept in the dark. On the contrary, as President Obama has stressed, the Congressional leadership of both parties was in on the NSA spying from the beginning. They deliberately kept it concealed from the American people. This follows a longstanding pattern, ranging from the Democratic leadership’s continuous renewal of the notorious provisions of the USA Patriot Act, to the briefings of Congressional leaders—again kept secret from the American people—on the Bush administration’s torture practices.

From the NSA and the military/intelligence apparatus, to the White House, to the rubber-stamp Congress and the rubber-stamp courts, every branch of the US government is complicit in a vast domestic spying operation that is both unconstitutional and criminal. The same goes for corporate America, with companies like Verizon, Microsoft, Google, Facebook and others willingly collaborating in the wholesale assault on the rights of the American people. As for the corporate media, it has done its best to bury the far-ranging implications of Snowden’s revelations.

What once again is exposed so clearly is that within the US ruling establishment there exists no constituency for democratic rights or democratic forms

of rule. Behind the rotted-out facade of democracy in America the outlines of a police-state dictatorship are emerging ever more clearly.

This turn toward dictatorial methods is driven by the unprecedented growth of social inequality in America, together with the ever-growing reliance on aggression and war in pursuit of US imperialist interests globally.

Democratic rights cannot be defended through the courts, the Congress, the Democratic or Republican Parties or any institution within the existing capitalist political setup. It requires the independent political mobilization of the working class, the sole force able to carry out the socialist transformation of society and the eradication of the conditions of inequality, repression and war that are the product of the capitalist system.



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