

David Miranda's detention and the raid on Britain's Guardian newspaper

Julie Hyland
24 August 2013

Events of the last week provide chilling confirmation of the police state apparatus built up by successive British governments on the pretext of the “war on terror.” They demonstrate how invocations of “national security” are used to justify anti-democratic conspiracies against working people and intimidate and punish anyone who dares to reveal the truth.

This is the significance of the illegal detention of David Miranda, the partner of *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald, for nearly nine hours at Heathrow Airport on August 18. Officials threatened Miranda with jail and seized his laptop, camera, cell phone and other personal items.

The detention was carried out under Schedule 7 of the UK Terrorism Act 2000, which permits the police to detain any individual at UK borders and confiscate their possessions, even if the police have no suspicion of criminal activity. It is illegal for those held not to answer questions, even in the absence of a lawyer, as was the case with Miranda.

Drawn up under the Labour government of Tony Blair, this draconian legislation was justified on the grounds that it was necessary to prevent bombings or other threats to airport security. No such considerations apply in the case of Miranda. The action was taken solely because of his relationship with Greenwald, who has collaborated closely with former National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden in documenting mass surveillance by US and UK spy agencies.

Snowden has been forced into exile in Russia in the face of an international campaign of threats and vilification against him by the Obama administration. Having failed to this point to railroad Snowden on trumped-up charges of espionage, the US and UK authorities are hunting down anyone associated with

him.

US politicians have made no secret of their desire to see Greenwald arrested. Now, after official denials, both UK and US authorities have admitted they knew of Miranda's travel plans and effectively sanctioned his detention.

Among items seized from Miranda was material thought to be related to US and UK spying operations against their own populations and globally.

At the High Court on Thursday, Miranda sought to prevent the British government and police from “inspecting, copying or sharing” the data they had illegally seized. But it emerged that officers from the SO15 Counter Terrorism Command had already begun trawling through the data on the grounds that it contained “highly sensitive material the disclosure of which would be gravely injurious to public safety.”

In the Orwellian world of modern-day Britain, the mere suspicion that a person holds information on state crimes is tantamount to “terrorism.” Thus, the High Court ruled that the authorities may not inspect or distribute the data, *except for “national security purposes” or to investigate whether Miranda himself is involved in the commission, instigation or preparation of an act of terrorism.*

Not only is this a toothless restriction, it is an implicit threat against Miranda. The High Court was informed that the Metropolitan Police had already launched a criminal investigation after seizing the data.

The implications for democratic rights are underscored by the disclosure earlier this week by *Guardian* Editor-in-Chief Alan Rusbridger that he and other *Guardian* journalists were threatened with legal action and forced to destroy hard drives containing material from Snowden.

Two months ago, Rusbridger wrote, he had been

contacted by “a very senior government official claiming to represent the views of the prime minister” about the Snowden material. “The tone was steely, if cordial, but there was an implicit threat that others within government and Whitehall favoured a far more draconian approach,” he said.

According to Rusbridger, “two GCHQ [Government Communications Headquarters] security experts” oversaw the destruction of hard drives as journalists used drills and grinders to smash memory chips containing encrypted files. This was despite the fact, as Rusbridger acknowledged, that the *Guardian* had agreed with the government to release only a small portion of the material it held.

This unprecedented assault on press freedom was authorised by Prime Minister David Cameron. Citing a “Downing Street source”, Tim Ross of the *Telegraph* recounted that Cameron had “explicitly” sanctioned the destruction of the *Guardian*’s equipment.

In yet another example of double-speak, the source claimed this was due to “fears that the *Guardian* ’s own computer system was not secure enough to be trusted with protecting such highly sensitive information.”

It was subsequently confirmed that the senior official involved was Britain’s top civil servant, Cabinet Secretary Sir Jeremy Heywood. “Heywood was directed by the prime minister to contact the *Guardian*”, the *Independent* reported. “The intention was to spell out the serious consequences of continuing to publish material about UK and US intelligence operations.”

Confirmation of the prime minister’s personal involvement makes clear that the UK and the US have declared open season on journalists, whistle-blowers and their friends, family and supporters.

While Snowden has been forced into exile, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange remains trapped in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London under threat of immediate arrest and extradition should he step out of the building. Wednesday saw the jailing of US whistleblower Bradley Manning for 35 years after a show trial aimed at whitewashing the state crimes he had courageously revealed.

No credence can be given to the self-serving claims of Charles Falconer QC, architect of the Terrorism Act 2000, that these actions result from a “misuse” of otherwise legitimate anti-terror powers.

Everywhere the bourgeoisie recognise that their economic order, based on massive and growing social inequality, is unviable and faces popular revolt. Hence the criminalisation of any form of political dissent and its branding as terrorism—the same pretext being used by the US- and UK-backed Egyptian military junta to massacre thousands of protesters.

The defence of democratic rights can be taken forward only independently of, and in opposition to, all sections of the bourgeoisie and its political representatives, in the struggle of the working class for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact