

Edward Snowden and *Guardian* witch-hunted by UK government, MI5 and media

Robert Stevens
14 October 2013

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition and Britain's intelligence chiefs have launched a counter-offensive against whistleblower Edward Snowden in an effort to legitimise and continue their spying on the UK population and much of the world.

Last week, Britain's new head of MI5, Sir Andrew Parker, used his first public address to make a veiled attack on the former US National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Snowden and to insinuate that the *Guardian* was assisting terrorism in making public his revelations.

While not mentioning either by name, Parker asserted that "It causes enormous damage to make public the reach and limits of GCHQ techniques." "Such information hands the advantage to the terrorists", he continued. "It is the gift they need to evade us and strike at will."

Such claims are a fraud. Snowden made public documents from the NSA and Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) showing programmes designed to spy on virtually every man, woman and child with Internet access or a telephone.

Parker made a feeble attempt to deny this. "In some quarters there seems to be a vague notion that we monitor everyone and all their communications, browsing at will through peoples' private lives for anything that looks interesting," he said. "That is, of course, utter nonsense."

Parker's speech was the signal for a concerted attack on Snowden from the highest echelons of the state, including Prime Minister David Cameron, along with barely concealed threats against the *Guardian*.

Sir David Omand, a former director of GCHQ and intelligence and security coordinator for the prime minister, stated, "The assumption the experts are working on is that all that information, or almost all of it, will now be in the hands of Moscow and Beijing. It's the most catastrophic loss to British intelligence ever, much worse than [Guy] Burgess and [Donald] MacLean in the Fifties".

Nigel Inkster, former deputy chief of MI6, told BBC Radio 4 that the Snowden leaks were "comparable" to those by the Cambridge spies, "only worse".

Burgess and MacLean were intelligence operatives for the Soviet Union, part of a spy ring at Cambridge University.

Cameron said, "When you get newspapers who get hold of vast amounts of data and information that is effectively stolen information and they think it is they think it's OK to reveal this, I think they have to think about their responsibilities and are they helping to keep our country safe."

The prime minister boasted of his personal responsibility for the unprecedented attack on press freedom of July 20, when computers owned by the *Guardian* containing files originating from Snowden were destroyed. "I sent the cabinet secretary and the national security adviser to go and see them to tell them about how dangerous it was for them to hold this information," he said, and "they agreed to have a whole lot of it destroyed".

Deputy prime minister and leader of the Liberal Democrats Nick Clegg said, "I've got no doubt that there were some parts of what were published, which would have passed most *Guardian* readers completely by because they were very technical, but would have been immensely interesting for people who want to do us harm."

Fellow Liberal Democrat and Business Secretary Vince Cable made a pose of defending the *Guardian*'s right to publish material, but then asserted that "a very substantial amount of really quite important highly sensitive intelligence seems to have got to people who shouldn't have got it, i.e., in Russia and China and elsewhere."

There is not a shred of evidence that Snowden's revelations, or the *Guardian*'s reportage, have "aided terrorism". They have exposed criminality on a mass

scale being conducted by the US and British governments, as well as other imperialist powers.

The moves against the *Guardian* reached a crescendo with the denunciation from Tory backbencher Julian Smith, who called the newspaper's actions in "sending detailed family and personal information about security agents across borders...illegal", and said they were "threatening our agents and their families. He demanded, "Can we have a statement from the Home Secretary to clarify that the law will be upheld whether or not the organisation involved is hiding behind the fig leaf of journalism?" *Sun* newspaper columnist Rod Liddle wrote a piece accusing the *Guardian* of "treason".

In a comment, "The Paper that Helps Britain's Enemies", the *Daily Mail* stated, "We believe the *Guardian*, with lethal irresponsibility, has crossed that line by printing tens of thousands of words describing the secret techniques used to monitor terrorists."

Former Labour Party home secretary Jack Straw supported the government, accusing the *Guardian* of "extraordinary naivety and arrogance".

It was the BBC that launched this counter-offensive by the state on its flagship *Newsnight* programme. Presenter Kirsty Wark conducted an interview with *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald on October 4, four days before Parker's speech. Throughout, she parroted the government and intelligence agencies' claims, asserting without substantiation that 58,000 unsecured documents were seized by UK border officials from Greenwald's partner David Miranda in August when he was illegally detained.

Greenwald said Wark's claim "was a lie," before telling her, "As a journalist you should be aware that simply because a government makes a claim, especially when they are making that claim in the middle of a lawsuit, while they are being sued for violating the law, one should not go around assuming that claim to be factually true."

Wark was wholly indifferent to such basic journalistic standards, asking Greenwald at one point, "Do you actually think it's a shock that spies do spy and that for a majority of the population perhaps, it might be quite reassuring. They might actually feel quite safe?"

The latest moves by the UK government and spy agencies are a pre-emptive strike in an attempt to silence any further reportage, based on material passed on by Snowden to journalists. They are a blatant attempt to criminalise any media coverage even slightly critical of the spy agencies, as a part of overall plans to clamp down

on press freedoms.

The move to restrict coverage of the Snowden revelations takes place against a background of the ongoing attempts to introduce press regulation in the UK. Last week, the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour parties agreed on the terms of a final draft of a Royal Charter, which could become law by the end of this month.

Playing soft cop for the government, Business Secretary Cable has called for "proper political oversight" of the security and intelligence agencies. But this is a hollow pose. The spy agencies do not need regulating, but must be opposed, exposed and disbanded.

Former cabinet member Chris Huhne has stated publicly that cabinet ministers and even members of the National Security Council were kept in "utter ignorance" regarding the Prism and Tempora spy programmes.

"The cabinet was told nothing about GCHQ's Tempora or its US counterpart, the NSA's Prism, nor about their extraordinary capability to hoover up and store personal emails, voice contact, social networking activity and even Internet searches," he said.

"I was also on the National Security Council, attended by ministers and the heads of the Secret [Intelligence Service, MI6] and Security Service [MI5], GCHQ and the military. If anyone should have been briefed on Prism and Tempora, it should have been the NSC.

"I do not know whether the prime minister or the foreign secretary (who has oversight of GCHQ) were briefed, but the NSC was not."

After making these extraordinary statements, Huhne too merely urged that, "the supervisory arrangements for our intelligence services" need "updating".

For years, GCHQ, MI5, MI6 and their US counterparts operated outside the law—and apparently without even a shred of parliamentary oversight. Now, Cable and Huhne respond by urging that the people directly implicated in this criminal behaviour, such as Cameron, be entrusted once more with the task of regulating the activities of the secret state.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact