

Snowden revelations lead to decline in support for US in Germany

Johannes Stern
12 November 2013

A new poll by the research institute Infratest dimap shows that Edward Snowden's revelations exposing the worldwide spying apparatus of the United States have had a deep impact on the consciousness of broad layers of the German population. The survey comes amidst an ongoing diplomatic crisis following the revelation that the US tapped the personal cell phone of German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Since the former National Security Agency contractor began to reveal the extent of the NSA's surveillance programs, support for the United States in general and President Barack Obama in particular has declined sharply. The percentage of Germans who consider the United States to be a reliable partner has plunged from close to 50 percent in July to 35 percent today. Some 61 percent are of the opinion that the United States cannot be trusted as a partner.

The numbers for Obama are even more dramatic. While 75 percent of Germans were satisfied with Obama in September 2012, today the figure is 43 percent. For the first time since Obama came into office, more than half of the German population has a negative view of the job he is doing. Only one year after his reelection, Obama, the former candidate of "change you can believe in," has reached support levels comparable to those of his hated predecessor, George W. Bush.

By contrast, more than 60 percent view Snowden as a hero. The poll shows that the demand to grant Snowden asylum finds increasing support among the German people. Almost half of those questioned spoke in favour of asylum for Snowden in Germany.

The results of the poll are an indication of how deeply Snowden's revelations have shaken the political and ideological basis of capitalist rule in the United States and internationally.

It is becoming increasingly clear to millions that the society in which they live is based on a lie. While the United States and its Western allies claim to stand for democracy and human rights, the reality is the opposite. They have created the structures of an international police state. The exposure of the illegal surveillance of hundreds of millions of people and dozens of governments has undermined the official claim that the vast US spying programs are dedicated to fighting terrorism.

An essay in the latest edition of the news magazine *Der Spiegel* provides the following characterization of the NSA surveillance programs: "This is about the breaking of laws, spying, and power politics: thirty five heads of state and government were spied upon; several trillion pieces of data of economic, military, scientific and political significance were stored; with this data, the actions of friend and foe were to be predicted and controlled. And the United States was thereby to have gained an advantage over the rest of the world, including Germany. Anyone who listens in on the German chancellor is thinking not about domestic security, but about strategic interests."

Snowden's revelations also shed light on the real character of relations between the imperialist powers. Since it became known that the United States has been spying not only on the world's population, but also on allied governments, including Germany, relations between Washington and Berlin have been severely strained.

Der Spiegel spoke of the "biggest political affair of recent history" and asserted that "allied intelligence agencies are treating the German chancellor like an Iranian ayatollah."

In the context of rising tensions, the call for asylum for Snowden has been taken up by sections of the

German ruling class. The latest edition of *Der Spiegel* takes up the demand on its front page, and politicians from the Left Party and the Greens are also raising it. At the beginning of the month, Green politician Hans Christian Ströbele traveled to Moscow to meet personally with Snowden and has been calling for the German government to grant him asylum ever since.

How are these calls to be understood? Parties and politicians that have worked closely with the German intelligence services for years and helped build up the state apparatus have not suddenly become defenders of democratic rights. The call to grant Snowden asylum from within the ranks of the ruling elite has nothing to do with a principled struggle against surveillance or the defence of Snowden and democratic rights.

German bourgeois politicians and the media are concerned with utilizing the growing tensions with the United States to obtain certain guarantees that the most blatant spying activities against politicians and businesses will be stopped. In this way, they hope to divert widespread popular discontent into safe channels before it turns against the German government itself.

Der Spiegel declared that asylum for Snowden would be “an impressive, risky and self-confident step” to establish “leverage” over the United States. “When the United States reflects upon the use of such actions, they should be forced by Angela Merkel and all of us to answer the simple question: does it benefit the United States to read Angela Merkel’s text messages, or does it benefit the United States to have allies?”

The Left Party’s parliamentary fraction warned in its latest statement: “Among friends, such actions are totally unacceptable and they undoubtedly endanger the friendship itself. The federal government has a duty to act decisively and avoid giving the impression that it thinks this is all not so bad. Possibly because the German government is doing the same in many countries? It is only necessary to think for a second what the response would have been if the Cambodian ambassador had been found to be involved in the spying affair. Development assistance... would have been halted very rapidly.”

Like the rest of the ruling class, the Left Party fears the consequences of the mounting tensions with the United States and the exposure of the lies upon which German imperialism rests.

Snowden also revealed how the German intelligence

agencies have collaborated with the United States for some time in surveillance of the German population. The NSA made available its notorious program Xkeyscore to Germany’s foreign intelligence agency (Federal Intelligence Service—BND) as well as the country’s domestic intelligence service (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution—BfV).

In recent days, it has become increasingly clear that the German government is seeking to use the Snowden affair to expand its cooperation with the American intelligence agencies. This has been at the centre of talks over the past week between the German government’s foreign policy adviser Christoph Heusgen, the heads of the BND and BfV Gerhard Schindler and Hans-Jörg Maasen, respectively, and their American counterparts.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* commented on the meeting and Germany’s plans as follows: “The goal of the German government is above all not to be treated any worse by the United States than its Anglo-Saxon partners from Canada to New Zealand, which have cooperated for decades in an informal spying alliance known as Five Eyes. Concretely, the Germans wish to exclude spying by governments on each other and establish a ban on economic spying on both sides.”

Germany’s goal of becoming the “sixth eye” in the international spying conspiracy against the world’s population shows that the defence of Snowden and democratic rights cannot be left to the German government or bourgeois parties such as the Greens and the Left Party. Only an independent movement of the working class can secure Snowden’s right to asylum in Germany and defend democratic rights.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact