

Indian workers and students defend Edward Snowden

Our reporters

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Workers and students in southern India have expressed their support for the international campaign by the *World Socialist Web Site* in defence of whistleblower Edward Snowden, who has exposed the vast illegal spying operations carried out by the US National Security Agency (NSA).

WSWS supporters in India campaigned among workers, students and professionals over the past month in Chennai, Neyveli and Bangalore, in the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Many people signed a statement denouncing the US-led witch-hunt against Snowden, reflecting growing concerns among workers and youth about global issues and attacks on basic democratic rights.

India's Congress-led government rejected Snowden's appeal for asylum, despite the fact he exposed massive US spying on India, targeting its diplomatic missions and top government officials. The Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, has also refused to defend Snowden.

In Chennai, WSWS supporters spoke to workers at the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) and Madras Export Processing Zone (MEPZ), as well as college students. In Bangalore, students and information technology employees extended their support to the campaign. In Neyveli, we spoke to Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC) workers.

The statement that people signed explained that Snowden had taken "a courageous step in revealing secret and illegal surveillance operations of the US National Security Agency ... directed at millions of people in the United States and around the world." It demanded an immediate end to the witch-hunt against Snowden and denounced the Indian government's refusal to grant him political asylum.

The statement also opposed "the Indian

government's own domestic surveillance operation, the Central Monitoring System (CMS), which gives intelligence agencies unchecked access to India's 900 million landline and mobile telephone users and 120 million Internet users."

In Neyveli, James, a three-wheeler driver, told the WSWS: "I agree with you there is no constituency among the US ruling class in support of democracy. However, the support that Snowden has been getting from ordinary American people shows there is a base of support among people in defence of democracy.

"Snowden's actions were courageous. Anyway, democracy cannot be defended through individual actions. It requires a social movement. In every country the ruling class views people as a hostile force. This is because their policies in support of big business have become unpopular."

Jabar Ali, an NLC regular worker, said: "The claim of the US ruling class that mass spying on people is to prevent terrorist actions is a lie. I agree that the real danger for the rights of the people is not coming from the terrorists but from the US capitalist state. A decade ago the US waged an aggressive war against Iraq, based on the utter lie that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction."

Another NLC worker commented: "Snowden exposed mass spying by the American state against not only its own people but also people around the world. It is the duty of the people of the world to come to his defence, because he spoke out for them. I didn't know about Snowden until I met you."

In Chennai, Kannan, an ICF worker, said: "I heard about Snowden. Now I have come to know more about this issue through you. I oppose the witch hunt against him. I also understand there is no government in the world that takes the side of workers. Now the Indian

government is working to privatise the government-owned ICF. As a result, our jobs will be destroyed. If they introduce a contract system, our wage scale will come down substantially.”

Monisa, the wife of an ICF worker, explained: “I am glad to know about the courageous actions of Snowden. He has staked his life to defend democracy and that must be applauded.” She commented on the ICF privatisation process: “I came to know about this from my husband. Whatever party comes to power, our living conditions remain bad. I would like to see a government working for the working people.”

Ganesh, a MEPZ worker, wanted to know why the WSWS launched a defence campaign for Snowden in India and whether it would have any impact. WSWS supporters explained the immense significance of Snowden’s revelations for the American and international working class. At stake was the defence of democratic rights, which were being violated by the US, as well as by other capitalist governments around the world. Snowden took a courageous stand in defence of these principles, and had to be supported and defended by the international working class.

Ganesh commented: “Indeed Snowden’s revelations have frightened the US government and it has become alienated from the people. Likewise, the Indian government has become discredited. That’s why both the US and Indian governments engage in mass spying operations. I am opposed to this. I agree we need an international movement to defend democratic rights and defend Snowden.”

Logesh, a political science student from Presidency College in Chennai, told the WSWS: “Snowden’s remarks that he has not violated the law and that his life is in danger are not exaggerated. In fact those senators and the media calling him a traitor are the real traitors. The increasingly dictatorial character of the US state has been revealed further by the way it tries to silence Snowden.”

In Bangalore’s BTM neighbourhood, Marathalli area and electronic city, WSWS supporters spoke to IT employees and students, including some from Andhra Pradesh. Many did not know much about Snowden, although some had heard about WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. They were, however, keen to know more about Snowden’s case and its international significance.



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