

Apologists for NSA redouble witch-hunt of Edward Snowden

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If anyone had any doubts about the real content of President Barack Obama's "reform" of the National Security Agency's massive spying programs, they should have been cleared up Sunday by the vicious bipartisan witch-hunt of the individual who made the NSA's illegal activities known to the public, Edward Snowden.

Three leading members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans, appeared on television talk shows to brand Snowden a traitor and Russian spy, providing a justification for his being tried and executed. The former NSA contractor has been charged by federal prosecutors—though not yet indicted—with felony counts under the 1917 Espionage Act.

Without Snowden's revelations of spying on the telephone calls, emails, text message and Internet activity of hundreds of millions of Americans and countless millions more around the world, there would have been no need for Obama to deliver his remarks at the Justice Department on Friday.

The US president's response consisted of meaningless rhetoric about "privacy" and vague proposals for "oversight," accompanied by a full-throated defense of the police state operations carried out by the NSA and other US intelligence agencies within the United States and around the world.

Obama's lying remarks, which included an attack on Snowden, were a green light for the most right-wing sections of the ruling establishment to go on the offensive, braying for the whistle-blower's blood.

Appearing on NBC's "Meet the Press"—appropriately sponsored by the Boeing Corporation—Representative Mike Rogers, the Republican chair of the House Intelligence Committee, described Snowden as "a thief, who, we believe, had some help; who stole information, the vast majority [having] nothing to do with privacy,"

but rather "had to do with how we operate overseas to collect information to keep Americans safe."

This is utter nonsense, given the multiple programs exposed by Snowden in which literally trillions of telephone and Internet records have been intercepted by the NSA. As for "how we operate overseas," this, as Snowden's revelations have made clear, includes bugging the phones and computers of government leaders such as Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, snooping on international meetings of the European Union and other bodies, and conducting industrial espionage on Brazil's state-owned oil corporation Petrobras as well as European companies and economic officials. These are all activities that have nothing to do with "keeping Americans safe" and everything to do with furthering the profit interests of US financial and corporate giants.

Rogers attempted to bolster his totally unsubstantiated allegations that Snowden is a spy by noting that "he arranged travel before he left," and that "he had a go bag, if you will." Arranging travel before you leave is a practice common to most rational people, not to mention someone who knew he would become the object of a worldwide manhunt once he revealed the NSA's illegal spying.

The congressman went on to state: "I believe there's a reason he ended up in the hands, the loving arms, of an FSB [Federal Security Service] agent in Moscow... I don't think it was a gee-whiz luck event that he ended up in Moscow under the handling of the FSB."

Asked whether she agreed that Snowden had been working with the Russians, Dianne Feinstein, the Democratic chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, replied: "He may well have. We don't know at this stage. But I think to glorify this act is really to set sort of a new level of dishonor."

Echoing these slanders, Mike McCaul, the Republican chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, told ABC News: “I personally believe that he was cultivated by a foreign power to do what he did. And he—I would submit, again, that he’s not a hero by any stretch. He’s a traitor.”

None of these officials, who have all served as rubber stamps and cheerleaders for the US military and intelligence apparatus, can offer a shred of evidence to back up charges that would condemn Snowden to death.

Some of what they say is simply absurd. The claim that Snowden flew into “the loving arms of an FSB agent in Moscow” is a flat out lie. After revealing multiple NSA crimes, Snowden was attempting to reach safe haven in Ecuador when the US government revoked his passport, leaving him stranded for 39 days in the transit lounge of Moscow’s Sheremetyevo international airport, where he had sought to change planes. This hardly suggests FSB handlers waiting to receive him.

Clearly, Washington did not expect Snowden to stay in Russia, given the US government’s thuggish operation to force down the airplane of President Evo Morales on suspicion that it was flying the ex-NSA contractor to asylum in Bolivia.

This campaign of lies and slanders, like Obama’s speech, is aimed at intimidating the public and suppressing opposition to the NSA’s police state operations both in the US and around the world. The intention—as with the witch-hunt and persecution of Julian Assange and Bradley Manning—is to cast Snowden as the criminal for exposing the real criminals, including Obama and the intelligence chiefs, who are responsible for shredding the US Constitution and conspiring to destroy the democratic rights of the American people.

The latest Quinnipiac poll, conducted earlier this month, showed support for Snowden has only grown in recent months, with 57 percent calling him a whistleblower, as opposed to 34 percent—barely one third—agreeing with Obama and the leadership of both major parties, who portray him as a traitor. Among younger people—18 to 29 years old—this sentiment has been even more overwhelming, with 77 percent indicating support for Snowden’s actions. Support is also substantially higher among Americans with

incomes of \$50,000 or less than among those taking in \$100,000 or more.

That this popular support for Snowden finds no expression within the political establishment or mass media only underscores the vast gulf separating working people, the vast majority of the population of the United States and the entire planet, from the moneyed oligarchy that controls both political parties, as well as the major newspapers and television networks.

The support for Snowden goes hand-in-hand with growing popular anger over record levels of social inequality and the US government’s policy of transferring social wealth to the rich while attacking the social and democratic rights of the working class and preparing new wars.

This support and this anger must be channeled into the development of a politically independent movement of the working class to defend Edward Snowden and defeat the drive by the ruling class toward a police state. This requires a struggle against the Obama administration, both major parties and the capitalist system they defend.



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