

Defend Edward Snowden!

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In an interview Sunday with the German television network ARD, former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden warned that US “government officials want to kill me.”

“These people, and they are government officials, have said they would love to put a bullet in my head or poison me when I come out of the supermarket, and then watch as I die in the shower,” Snowden said.

Snowden’s warning that the US government wants him dead to suppress his revelations of illegal NSA spying must be taken with the utmost seriousness. It raises the urgency of developing a mass movement to defend him and oppose the destruction of democratic rights.

Snowden was referring to an article posted on the *Buzzfeed* web site based on interviews with US intelligence and military officials, who candidly discussed their desire to assassinate him. Among them was an Army intelligence officer who offered a startling proposal for murdering Snowden: “... we would end it very quickly. Just casually walking on the streets of Moscow... he is casually poked by a passerby. He thinks nothing of it at the time and starts to feel a little woozy and thinks it’s a parasite from the local water. He goes home very innocently and next thing you know he dies in the shower.”

Given that the Obama administration has already carried out extra-judicial murders of four US citizens with Hellfire missiles, such statements can hardly be dismissed as fantasies. On the contrary, they are entirely consistent with the political gangsterism being employed to prepare Snowden’s liquidation.

The desire to “end it [the revelations of US spying on average Americans and people all over the world] very quickly” is shared by the agents of the NSA, CIA and Pentagon all the way up to the Obama White House.

One thing is certain, the US government has no intention of offering Snowden a fair trial. Snowden and

his attorney have made this clear. In his interview, Snowden said that any proceeding against him would be a show trial, with the 1917 Espionage Act employed to preclude his putting up a defense of his actions based on their exposure of a secretive and illegal police state apparatus. Documents supporting his defense would be deemed classified and ruled out as evidence, and he would have no opportunity to appeal to the democratic sensibilities of the jury.

The political witch-hunt that the US establishment is whipping up against Snowden demonstrates that it has no intention of offering any trial. Politicians of both parties have denounced him as a spy and a traitor. Fascist thugs in the media, such as the *Wall Street Journal*’s Daniel Henninger, openly call for his death.

Within this context, Attorney General Eric Holder’s offer last week of “conversations” leading to a plea deal is merely political cover for the plans of the US government to use extra-judicial means to bring a halt to the exposure of its illegal spying operations.

Insisting in an MSNBC interview that clemency for Snowden “goes too far,” Holder stated, “He broke the law, he caused harm to our national security—I think he has to be held accountable for his actions.” Holder’s remarks echoed his statement at the University of Virginia last Thursday that if Snowden were “...coming back to the US to enter a plea, we would engage with his lawyers.”

The proposal that Snowden return to the US and quietly accept imprisonment boils down to the ultimatum: “Shut up and go to prison, or we’ll kill you.” If Snowden were to set foot on US soil, no one would ever see him again.

For the ex-NSA contractor, who is now living as a stateless refugee in Russia, the threat of state murder is very real whether or not he returns to the US. Two of the charges laid against him by the Obama administration are felony counts under the Espionage

Act, which carry the death penalty. And the record of American imperialism in assassinating figures it deems politically undesirable is well established—from the days when the CIA earned the title Murder Inc. to Obama’s drone strikes.

The *Financial Times* of London provided one of the frankest assessments of the US government’s “deeply delicate dilemma” in trying Edward Snowden. It noted that “a trial could potentially bring further disclosures and—from the government’s point of view—risks galvanising even more popular support for Mr. Snowden.”

Polls show mass support for Snowden, which is all the more remarkable since this sentiment finds no reflection in either major party or in the corporate media, all of which have smeared him as a traitor and spy. While the latest Pew Research survey finds the population as a whole split roughly down the middle as to whether Snowden’s revelations have served the public interest, among those between the ages of eighteen and thirty, 57 percent support his actions while just 35 percent oppose them.

There is growing anxiety within the ruling establishment that Snowden’s courageous actions express not just his own opposition to the criminal activities of the government, but sentiments building up among the population at large, and particularly among workers, students and youth. These layers are increasingly fed up with a government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich that destroys democratic rights as it transfers the social wealth to the financial aristocracy and wages wars of aggression.

Snowden’s revelations are exposing those in power as the real criminals, making them all the more determined to physically shut him up and make an example of him. Holden insists that Snowden “has to be held accountable for his actions.” But what about those—from Obama on down—who devised, authorized and implemented mass spying programs, a system of total control over the population, in brazen violation of both the law and the fundamental rights spelled out in the US Constitution?

The police state apparatus that has been exposed by Snowden’s revelations has been built up to defend the interests of the financial oligarchy that controls the US government. Its totalitarian operations are aimed not at foiling terrorist plots, but at furthering American

capitalism’s predatory aims. Abroad, these entail not only preparing wars, but also spying on supposed allies and carrying out industrial espionage against rival corporations. At home, they mean spying and collecting dossiers on American working people, who are seen as an increasingly hostile and dangerous enemy.

The working class represents the only genuine constituency for the defense of democratic rights. Mass support must be mobilized among workers, students and youth to defend Edward Snowden and expose the state conspiracies against him. His defense is inseparable from a struggle against the capitalist system, which is giving rise to police state dictatorship as it destroys the conditions of life for billions of people around the world.



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