

Australian government joins international witch-hunt of Edward Snowden

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Over the past fortnight, the Australian government has joined the witch-hunt being orchestrated by the Obama administration against National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden with the aim of charging and jailing him in the US, or silencing him permanently.

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott last week branded Snowden “a traitor” who was guilty of “betraying his country.” Abbott’s comments followed those of Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, who hysterically accused Snowden of “unprecedented treachery” and “shamefully betraying his nation while skulking in Russia.”

These denunciations feed directly into the campaign of lies and threats being whipped up in ruling circles in the US. Unnamed American intelligence and military officials are publicly airing proposals for Snowden’s assassination. Senior government officials such as National Intelligence Director James Clapper and Attorney General Eric Holder demand his return to the US to face a show trial on trumped-up espionage charges.

The attacks on Snowden by Abbott and Bishop demonstrate the utter servility of the Australian government and political establishment as a whole to Washington. Bishop was literally reading off the script dictated by the White House—making her remarks after meeting Vice President Joe Biden and National Security Adviser Susan Rice. No other government internationally has denounced Snowden in such terms.

Like the criminals in the White House, the Abbott government is seeking to blacken Snowden’s name in order to divert attention from Canberra’s own criminal activities. What Snowden has exposed is the vast police-state operation conducted by the NSA and allied intelligence agencies on the American people and the

population of the globe. The response of the Abbott government demonstrates just how central Australia is to the US military-intelligence apparatus, particularly in Asia.

Snowden’s leaked documents reveal that Australian diplomatic posts throughout the region function as NSA electronic listening posts. Australian intelligence agencies monitored the phone calls of the Indonesian president, his wife and other top officials. Australian telecommunications companies signed secret deals with the NSA to plug into undersea Internet cables and monitor the confidential electronic data belonging to millions of ordinary people in the Asia-Pacific.

These vast spying operations are intimately bound up with the US preparations for war against China and for police-state measures against the working class at home. Australia’s centrality to the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia”, which is aimed at encircling China militarily, was underscored by the fact that the policy was formally announced not at the White House, but in the Australian parliament in November 2011. Australia borders vital naval sea routes, including those identified by the Pentagon as “choke points” to cut off the supply of oil and other raw materials to China in the event of a military confrontation.

Australia’s integration into the US intelligence-espionage apparatus is vital to the US war drive. Electronic surveillance, spying and cyber-attacks play an indispensable role in modern warfare. US-operated signals intelligence facilities in Australia, such as Pine Gap, have been critical to the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as Obama’s criminal drone attacks in the Middle East and Central Asia. In the event of a US war with China, Australia’s military and intelligence bases ensure that Canberra will automatically be

involved from the outset.

That is why Washington cannot tolerate a sliver of difference from Canberra. The US has a long history of intervening in Australian politics. In 1975, not long after orchestrating bloody coups in Indonesia and Chile, the CIA was closely involved in the ousting of the Whitlam Labor government via the unelected representative of the British monarch, Governor General John Kerr. While Whitlam had reassured Washington that Pine Gap and other US bases would not be touched, there was concern in ruling circles in the US and Australia that his government was losing control of the working class amid a growing political radicalisation.

In June 2010, as the Obama administration was preparing to announce its “pivot,” the first term Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was removed overnight in unprecedented circumstances by factional power-brokers, identified in WikiLeaks cables as “protected sources” of the US embassy in Canberra. Rudd had declared himself “rock-solid” on the Australian-US alliance, but his attempts to mediate the rising tensions between the US and China cut across Washington’s plans.

Julia Gillard, who was identified by embassy officials as a far more pliable figure, was installed. Once in office, she immediately demonstrated her pro-US credentials. Gillard publicly denounced WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, declaring that he had committed criminal offences by releasing US embassy cables exposing the sordid machinations and crimes of US imperialism and other governments around the world. She welcomed Obama to Australia to give his “pivot” speech in 2011 and signed an agreement to station US Marines in the northern city of Darwin and open up other military bases to American forces.

The current Coalition government, which took power last September, has taken up where its Labor predecessor left off. On taking office, Abbott declared that Canberra and the US were “more than allies,” adding that he did not “regard America as a foreign country.” On every issue, from the denunciations of Snowden to its provocative criticism of China’s air defence identification zone last November, the Abbott government has been a willing attack dog for the Obama administration.

Workers and young people in Australia and around

the world should reject the slander campaign being conducted against Edward Snowden. His courageous stand has exposed how advanced the preparations are for the imposition of a police state in the United States, Australia and their allies.

Amid a worsening breakdown of global capitalism, the working class represents the only social force capable of overthrowing the profit system that is responsible for the drive to war and dictatorship. Mass support must be mobilised among workers, students and youth to defend Snowden and expose the state conspiracies against him. His defence is inseparable from the fight to build an independent movement of the working class against the threat of war and the assault on fundamental democratic rights.



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