

Edward Snowden and Europe's pseudo-left

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The European Parliament this week killed an amendment calling for National Security Agency (NSA) whistle-blower Edward Snowden to be granted asylum in Europe and opposing his “prosecution, extradition or rendition by third parties.” The action underscores that there is no constituency within the ruling elite internationally that defends democratic rights.

At Wednesday's meeting, the European Parliament's civil liberties committee approved a 60-page draft report on mass surveillance from which Snowden's name had been excised. But it was only due to the heroic efforts of Snowden that the world became aware of the mass spying operations against hundreds of millions of people in Europe, the United States and the rest of the world being conducted by the NSA, Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and the secret services of other major powers.

The report was commissioned last year amid a wave of hypocritical denunciations of the US by European governments over the revelations leaked by Snowden. The sole concern of the European political establishment was not the dire implications for democratic rights posed by mass state surveillance, but the fact that the US was seeking political and commercial advantage, which impinged on the economic and geo-political interests of the major European powers.

The European governments are absolutely at one with the maintenance of a vast surveillance operation directed at monitoring every activity of people the world over, including the more than 700 million Europeans.

The draft report to the European Parliament by British Labourite Claude Moraes does not call for an end to state surveillance, only its “reform”. It is “vital that transatlantic cooperation in counter-terrorism continues,” the draft asserts, adding that the European

Parliament “is ready actively to engage in a dialogue with US counterparts.”

In short, the European Union and its constituent governments want access to the information gathered by the US along with some sort of assurance that the NSA will observe a measure of political decorum when it comes to spying on such figures as German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

What is more, Snowden has revealed that France and Germany have similar systems of mass surveillance, which differ from Britain's GCHQ spying network only in the degree to which they have access to information gathered by the NSA. Britain, as part of the “Five Eyes” (US, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), has special access. Germany and France want a similar arrangement to supplement their own surveillance operations.

The US has used every diplomatic and political means in its arsenal to deny Snowden his democratic rights, insisting that any European Parliament report contain no criticism of US spying. Last year, US Senator Chris Murphy (Democrat from Connecticut), who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs, pointed out in Brussels that the US surveillance was carried out “largely in coordination with your countries' intelligence services.”

Events have also refuted the claims of the various parties of the European United Left-Nordic Green Left within the European Parliament to be opponents of state spying and defenders of Snowden and other whistle-blowers. The group encompasses Stalinist, former social democratic and pseudo-left formations including Die Linke (Left Party) of Germany, the Left Party of Jean Luc Melenchon and the French Communist Party, Syriza of Greece, the Spanish Communist Party-led Izquierda Unida (United Left), and Communist Refoundation of Italy.

The president of the group is Gabi Zimmer of Die Linke. In a press release, Zimmer said the group “welcome the adoption of this [European Parliament] report” because it was “in effect admitting that this spying and surveillance actually took place, instead of just being suspected.”

The “down side,” she continued, was that “there was no real discussion about the abuse of anti-terrorism laws based on false assumptions, nothing about offering asylum to Snowden, no demand to put an end to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), and no real revision of the overall security architecture today, with the blurring of lines between internal and external security, police and intelligence.”

Here, the victimization of Snowden, including death threats from US intelligence officials, is little more than an afterthought or bargaining chip to be traded in return for empty phrases about “reforming” totalitarian spying operations.

In a similar vein, last October, after Snowden’s revelations that European leaders, including Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande, had been spied on by the US, the vice president of the more narrow Party of the European Left group, Maite Mola of the Communist Party of Spain, spoke up to defend the interests of the European elite. She said, “It is time that Europe, with a single, clear and forceful voice, asks for responsibilities to the United States for spying upon millions of European citizens and the EU heads of states and presidents. It’s also time to rethink commercial, military, and police treaties, including NATO, with a country that has spied on 35 world leaders.”

Zimmer and Mola speak as bourgeois politicians, for whom Snowden’s fate is of no consequence.

The caveats placed on welcoming the EU report merely echo the concerns of sections of Europe’s ruling elite—over the impact of the TTIP on European industry and support for a more orderly approach to domestic and overseas surveillance and policing operations. In this way, the pseudo-left organizations provide political cover for the openly right-wing parties, such as the Social Democratic Party of Germany, the Socialist Party of France and Britain’s Labour Party, whose votes enabled the defeat of the amendment calling for Snowden’s rights to be protected.

The complicity of the pseudo-left in Snowden’s persecution dovetails with their hostility to any campaign in defence of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Some of the most insidious attacks on Assange have come from these organizations, which backed his extradition to Sweden on the basis of trumped-up allegations of rape.

The British Socialist Workers Party published an August 2012 article headlined “Julian Assange must face rape charges,” knowing full well that no charges had actually been laid against Assange and that extradition to Sweden would only be a stepping stone to transfer to the United States to face charges of espionage for having exposed American war crimes.

The pseudo-left groups are apologists for reaction and defenders of the interests of European imperialism. Over a protracted period, they have been incorporated into the structures of the capitalist state, to which they have innumerable political and personal connections. Christine Buchholz, a leading member of Die Linke and the Marx 21 group, represents the Left Party in the defence committee of the German parliament.

The working class is the only social and political force that can take forward a defence of democratic rights.

The threats against the life of Snowden by figures in the US political and intelligence establishment and ongoing attempts to railroad Assange into prison must be met with mass opposition. This requires a movement that links the defence of democratic rights with socialist opposition to 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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