

Christopher Boyce: “Snowden is a very brave man”

Former US intelligence contractor speaks on 1975 Australian coup

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Christopher Boyce, who was jailed for 25 years for leaking information about US spying and political destabilisation operations against the Whitlam Labor government in Australia during 1974 and 1975, was interviewed on Australian public broadcaster SBS’s “Dateline” program last month.

Boyce, now 61, confirmed his previous statements that the CIA—aided by agents inside the Australian labour and trade union movement—was centrally involved in the 1975 “Canberra Coup” that ousted the Labor government.

Boyce, who was just 22 when he began to expose the CIA’s operations, expressed admiration for today’s generation of whistleblowers, Julian Assange, Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden. He warned Snowden that the American government would never stop in its efforts to capture him and “do to him exactly what they did to me.”

Like Snowden, Boyce came from a conservative family whose connections enabled him to obtain employment with a US intelligence contractor, only to be shocked by what he discovered about the activities of the spy apparatus.

In late 1974, Boyce joined TRW, an aerospace and weapons contractor with close links to the CIA, as a telex operator and cypher clerk in Los Angeles. He found himself handling some of the US government’s most sensitive communications.

The messages came from the National Security Agency (NSA) installation at Pine Gap, near Alice Springs in central Australia. It was supposedly a joint US-Australian base, operating under a secret 1966 agreement between Washington and Canberra, but Boyce soon discovered it was monitoring the Australian government.

Boyce embarked on a personal mission to damage the US military and intelligence complex, supplying classified crypto keys and program secrets to his boyhood friend Andrew Daulton Lee, an amateur drug dealer who travelled to Mexico and sold the information to the Soviet intelligence service, the KGB.

In 1977, Boyce and Lee were arrested and convicted of espionage. Facing decades in prison, in 1980, Boyce escaped and went on the run, robbing a number of banks before being recaptured a year and a half later.

During 1982 Boyce was interviewed by the Australian Channel Nine TV program, “60 Minutes.” He alleged that the CIA had engineered Whitlam’s downfall, and that senior CIA officials referred to Governor-General Sir John Kerr, who dismissed Whitlam’s government, as “our man Kerr.”

After the interview was aired on “60 Minutes,” Boyce’s revelations were systemically blacked out in the mass media. In 1985, however, his story became the subject of a movie, called *The Falcon and the Snowman*, starring Timothy Hutton and Sean Penn, based upon the 1979 book of the same title by Robert Lindsay.

Boyce, his wife Cait and their friend Vincent Font recently published an e-book sequel, *The Falcon and the Snowman: American Sons*, about his long years in prison and final release. In the book’s preface, Boyce explains what triggered his actions. Upon commencing work in TRW’s “Black Vault,” which was an NSA encryption operation linked to Pine Gap, he was told that the Whitlam government was “a threat to American interests” and “their inquiries about Pine Gap were compromising the security of the project.”

Later he “read encrypted dispatches discussing the infiltration of Australian trade unions by the CIA” and “watched my government deceive an ally, an English speaking parliamentary democracy.”

Boyce wrote: “I concede I was naive, that allies deceive each other every day, but still I was disgusted. Without giving it the deliberation it deserved, I decided to do as much damage to the American intelligence community as I could possibly do.”

In last month’s “Dateline” interview, Boyce said he did not regret his actions. “I think these things were all things that needed to be said.” On commencing work at TRW he had asked himself: “This is going to be my job? Deceiving Australia?”

Boyce said the intelligence officials with whom he worked regarded Whitlam as “taking Australia to socialism.” In their view, Whitlam “was even proposing not renewing the Pine Gap treaty, and if he had done that ... then America’s eyes in a strategic sense would have been closed.”

These remarks highlight the pivotal importance to the

American government and its military-intelligence apparatus of the Pine Gap base, from which satellite surveillance and CIA operations are conducted throughout the entire Asia-Pacific region, from Afghanistan to China.

Whitlam was a right-wing social democrat, not a socialist, and did not, in fact, threaten to shut down Pine Gap. As proven by documents published in 2012, recording exchanges between Whitlam's government and the Nixon administration from 1972 to 1974, the Australian prime minister assured the US president that a Labor government would not rescind the agreements over Pine Gap and other US installations in Australia. (See: "Nixon-Whitlam tapes shed light on current Australian rifts over US-China conflict")

However, amid a global upsurge of the working class, which had begun in France with the May/June general strike in 1968, Nixon and his advisers were not convinced that Whitlam could deliver on his assurances. Strikes and social struggles erupted in Australia in 1973-74, just as defeat loomed in Vietnam and Nixon himself faced impeachment over the Watergate affair. Before he was forced to resign, Nixon ordered a secret study assessing the impact of Australia curtailing its "intelligence sharing."

Washington's concerns about the capacity of the Whitlam government to contain the working class in Australia were shared within sections of the Australian ruling elite. After the Murdoch media launched a campaign to discredit and destabilise the government, the Liberal-National opposition, led by Malcolm Fraser, used its majority in the Senate to block financial supply to the government, creating an acute political and constitutional crisis.

This provided the pretext for Whitlam to be removed from office by Governor-General Kerr, using the antidemocratic "reserve powers" derived from the British monarchy. The military was put on alert as workers walked off the job all over the country, and some of the largest protests in Australia's history erupted. Terrified of this movement and intent on preserving the established order, Whitlam, the Labor Party and trade union leaders, led by Australian Council of Trade Unions president Bob Hawke, spent days urging an end to the strikes and protests, eventually dissipating the resistance.

Speaking to "Dateline," Boyce again stated that the CIA had agents inside the unions who assisted the operation against the Whitlam government. He hinted that he had further information about the CIA's machinations, but feared official reprisal. "Doing this interview is about as far as I'm going to stick my neck out," he said. "My problem is that if I get convicted of anything, I go back to prison forever."

Boyce said the problem of mass surveillance was even greater today. "Our civil liberties are being trashed, and I'm really glad that Snowden and Manning have released these things. I think Snowden's a very brave man. I think he's kind of a hero, and the volume of things that he's revealed just astounds me."

Boyce said his views of the intelligence agencies had not changed. "It's almost like the enemy are the people themselves. You know, like the movie, it will be the tail that wags the dog, and I think it already is. If I was going to tell Snowden something, I would tell him that they will never stop trying to get their hands on him. They will relentlessly pursue him ... they're just going to grind him down."

Boyce explained: "They want people afraid so that they don't do what Snowden did ... But, you know, I think there'll be another Snowden. I think that it's just a matter of time somebody else, for whatever reasons, will step forward." This was the only way to control the "surveillance state," because "certainly Congress is never going to make any meaningful reform."

As Boyce suggests, any "reforms" will only seek to legitimise and continue the global spying on millions of people. As Snowden, Manning and Assange have documented, the Obama administration and the NSA have vastly expanded the surveillance, dirty tricks and regime-change operations conducted by US imperialism and its allies, including Australia.

This included US involvement, via "protected sources" in the Labor Party, in the operation to oust Kevin Rudd as prime minister in mid-2010—as confirmed by US diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks. Rudd's removal, like Whitlam's, underscored the ruthlessness of the US ruling elite in dealing with any perceived obstacle to its global interests. Rudd had simply proposed diplomatic initiatives, such as a new Asia-Pacific grouping, that cut across the Obama administration's determination to confront China and reassert US hegemony over the entire region.

Boyce's interview provides a timely and crucial warning. If the CIA and the NSA ensured the ousting of Whitlam and Rudd, both loyal servants of the profit system and committed supporters of the Australian ruling elite's US alliance, they will move savagely against working class opposition to the worsening social and economic conditions, violation of basic democratic rights and threat of war.



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