

The International Socialist Organization's silence on CIA spying

Patrick Martin
25 March 2014

Tuesday marks two weeks since the remarkable speech on the floor of the Senate by the chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Dianne Feinstein, in which she charged the Central Intelligence Agency with illegal actions and gross violation of the constitutional separation of powers.

Feinstein, a longtime defender of the US intelligence apparatus, voiced her concern over the CIA's actions in gaining secret access to her committee's computer files, in the course of a dispute over the draft report on CIA torture at secret prisons. She also denounced the agency's filing of a criminal referral with the Department of Justice, seeking an investigation into whether Senate committee staffers gained unauthorized access to CIA documents on the torture program.

The WSWWS has since had occasion to note the efforts of the corporate-controlled media in the United States—the major daily newspapers and the television networks—to bury the issues posed by the CIA spying scandal (see “The US media and the CIA's spying on Congress”).

Above all, the media has sought to divert attention from the role of the Obama administration. Given that CIA Director John Brennan is an Obama appointee, and formerly held a top national security position in the White House as head of the drone-missile assassination program, it is inconceivable that he has been waging war against the Senate without Obama's knowledge.

On the contrary, White House officials have admitted that Obama authorized the CIA to withhold documents from the intelligence committee, and that he was informed ahead of time before the CIA filed its criminal referral with the Justice Department. This means that Obama himself is potentially implicated in impeachable offenses: covering up for the CIA torture program and unconstitutional spying by the executive

branch against the legislature.

There is another political quarter where a politically revealing silence reigns on both the CIA spying scandal and Obama's role in it: the pseudo-left publication *Socialist Worker*, newspaper and web site of the International Socialist Organization.

In the two weeks since Feinstein's speech, *Socialist Worker* has published nothing on the CIA spying on Congress, or on the subsequent letters sent by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to the Justice Department and the CIA, reiterating Feinstein's warning of a fundamental constitutional clash.

Equally remarkable is that *Socialist Worker* has said nothing about the underlying issue that sparked the conflict between Feinstein and the CIA: the Senate panel's drafting of a 6,300-page report on torture by CIA operatives at secret prisons set up under the Bush administration in the name of fighting the “war on terror.”

A search of the socialistworker.org web site for 2014 shows nothing on CIA torture, nothing on Feinstein, nothing on CIA Director John Brennan, nothing on CIA spying on the US Senate, nothing on Reid's letters to the Justice Department and CIA.

How is this silence to be explained? The ISO is, as the WSWWS has previously explained, not an organization of the “left,” in the sense of representing a section of the working class, or a genuine, even if politically limited or misguided, opposition to the American ruling elite. The social base of the ISO is a layer of the privileged upper middle class, including a section of the trade union bureaucracy and the identity politics organizations that orbit around the Democratic Party.

This social layer is in conflict with the ruling financial aristocracy only in the sense that it desires a

greater share of the wealth extracted from the labor of working people and largely monopolized by the top 0.01 percent.

Like its counterparts internationally, the ISO is a faction within bourgeois politics, functioning as a pressure group on the Democratic Party, working in some cases through the union bureaucracy, in others directly through Democratic Party politicians in cities like Chicago, Detroit and New York.

The eruption of a constitutional conflict involving rival factions of the Democratic Party poses uncomfortable choices for a satellite organization like the ISO. Their political instinct is to line up automatically with the Democrats against the Republicans, as the “lesser evil,” but this strategy lacks applicability here, since Obama, Feinstein and Reid are all leading figures in the Democratic Party.

More fundamentally, the ISO has been moving steadily to the right, aligning itself with the reactionary imperialist foreign policy of the Obama administration and its mounting attacks on democratic rights. The ISO tacitly backed the US-NATO war against Libya and lobbied for the CIA-backed “revolution” in Syria.

The ISO has been largely silent on the drone warfare orchestrated and directed by the White House, as well as the claim by Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder that the US president has unreviewable and unchallengeable authority to order the assassination of any individual on the planet.

On the rare occasions when the ISO does address these issues, it is to spread the most poisonous complacency about the dangers to democratic rights. A case in point is the recent commentary in *Socialist Worker*, posted March 5, 2014, by Nicole Colson, under the headline “COINTELPRO 2.0.”

The headline is a reference to the program of surveillance, infiltration and disruption of left-wing organizations carried out by the FBI in the 1960s and 1970s, known by its bureaucratic acronym COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence program). The article notes the revival of such methods today (referring to the revelations of NSA leaker Edward Snowden, not the CIA spying), but then declares:

“Generally, the attack on our rights today is not as bold and overt as when federal agents rounded up and deported foreign-born socialists; or executed Communist Party members as atomic spies; or stormed

into a Chicago apartment building and murdered Black Panther leader Fred Hampton in his bed.”

To drive home the message that really, there’s nothing to worry about, the commentary continues: “The American ruling class prefers to rule by consent... But the still-unfolding NSA scandal is further evidence of the fact that it will resort to coercion as necessary.”

There is not a shred of serious historical perspective in such an analysis. The truth is that the preparations for a police state in America are far more advanced today than they were in the 1960s, because the economic and social crisis of American capitalism is vastly greater than it was 50 years ago. The capitalist state is today armed with legal powers and techniques of repression that make J. Edgar Hoover and Senator Joseph McCarthy look like rank amateurs.

The WSWS has long noted—since the stolen presidential election of 2000—that there is no significant constituency for the defense of democratic rights within any section of the US ruling elite. This includes the political hangers-on of big business in pseudo-left groups like the ISO.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact