German government seeks to prevent parliamentary committee from questioning Edward Snowden

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16 April 2014

The parties in the German coalition government, the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), are attempting to prevent a German parliamentary committee from looking into NSA spying by questioning US whistleblower Edward Snowden.

The government parties are dead set against Snowden, who has uncovered the mass surveillance of the world population by the intelligence services, being allowed to endanger German foreign policy relations with the US.

An application for a hearing with the former NSA contractor presented by Green Party and Left Party representatives was systematically held up at a sitting of the committee last Thursday. CDU/CSU and SPD committee members decided to hold the vote on the application at the subsequent sitting of the committee. Prior to that meeting, the government will issue a report determining if and to what extent the questioning of Snowden is actually possible.

As the next sitting of the committee will not take place until May 8, this leaves Chancellor Angela Merkel in the clear for her visit to the US, where she is headed May 2. The coalition government calculated that it could thereby at least temporarily avoid offending Germany's most important foreign policy ally.

Since the NSA investigative committee began its work, the German government has made clear it has no interest in bringing the criminal machinations of the NSA and its collaboration with the German intelligence agencies to light—quite the contrary.

Snowden has revealed a massive, illegal spying network that violates fundamental democratic rights. "Every email in the whole world can be read. … The traffic on every website can be observed, every computer, every laptop which is targeted can be followed from place to place across the world," Snowden told news radio station NDR at the beginning of the year.

Snowden has made clear that Germany's Federal Intelligence Service (BND) has access to the NSA's databanks through the XKeyScore programme. Snowden has not only shown that the BND has access to data on German citizens, but also suggested that it collects such data itself.

Journalist Glenn Greenwald, who is familiar with Snowden's material and has published portions of it, told the daily *Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung*, "It would be incredibly irresponsible to investigate the NSA's spying in Germany without asking the person who knows more about it on this planet than anyone else [i.e., Snowden] … No-one can speak of a serious investigation if these details are not being reviewed."

The German government has no interest in a serious investigation, which might expose its own crimes. The coalition parties are seeking to prevent Snowden from testifying as a witness. Although the opposition parties on the investigative committee have the right to invite witnesses themselves, there have been bitter conflicts right from the outset. Last week, committee chairman Clemens Binninger, from the CDU, resigned.

Binninger, who was involved in the investigation of the murders committed by the right-wing NSU terrorist group as the CDU/CSU representative, said he was resigning because the Green Party and Left Party were using the committee to raise their "political profile." In addition, he had severe doubts as to whether inviting

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Snowden made sense. It was questionable if Snowden would have anything at all new to share, and at the time of his testimony to the European parliament, he had made very general statements.

Such claims are absurd and dishonest. The principal reason why Snowden was not able to go into detail in Strasbourg, the seat of the European parliament, was because the first condition of his asylum in Russia requires that he not cause any further damage to US foreign policy.

Snowden is still in Russia. However, his one-year asylum runs out at the end of July. The US government considers him a traitor, has invalidated his passport and demanded his extradition. If he were extradited to the US, he could even face the death penalty. Snowden's fate is entirely uncertain, including due to the sharp tensions between Moscow and Washington.

The former NSA contractor is prepared to give testimony to the German parliamentary investigative committee. He was "very willing" to testify and did not set any preconditions, Wolfgang Kaleck, his lawyer in Berlin, made clear on Friday. Kaleck explained that the amount of detail that Snowden could provide would depend on the concrete conditions under which the testimony took place.

Binninger's resignation as committee chair was apparently the result of strong pressure being exerted to avoid Snowden's testimony at all costs. Konstantin von Motz, the Green Party representative on the committee, speculated about the direct intervention of the chancellor's office and the CDU/CSU fraction leadership, although Binninger denied this.

The committee's work has been directly influenced by the recent shift in German foreign policy. After the coalition government collaborated in bringing about a coup in Ukraine and heated up its aggressive confrontation with Russia, nothing can be allowed to disrupt the transatlantic alliance.

Interior minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU) made this clear recently. In an interview in the latest issue of *Der Spiegel*, the weekly news magazine, he stated that the cooperation between the US, British and German intelligence agencies was essential. "It is in our national interests. And this cannot be put at risk, including by the investigative committee."

The interior spokesman for the CDU/CSU parliamentary fraction, Stephan Mayer, bluntly alluded to the fate awaiting Snowden if he in fact testified before the investigative committee: "If Snowden came to Germany, the German government, in my opinion, would have to grant the US extradition request, which is legally indisputable."

The new chair of the investigative committee, Patrick Sensburg (CDU), also left no doubt over the weekend that he considered Snowden's testimony on German territory virtually unthinkable. He said in the *Bild am Sonntag* newspaper that he viewed Snowden appearing in Germany "to be very problematic legally." Instead, a hearing via video conference or "in a secure third country" might be considered. It was not the job of the investigative committee to provide Snowden with asylum in Germany.

The desire of the CDU/CSU and SPD to block Snowden's personal appearance before the committee, by any means necessary, speaks volumes about the character of the grand coalition. Instead of exposing the international conspiracy of the intelligence agencies, it is striving domestically to expand surveillance measures that are clearly in violation of the law. The German government is just as anti-democratic and hostile to the population as its American counterpart, and is expanding its police-state structures.

The actions of the Greens and Left Party in the committee have nothing to do with the defence of democratic rights. These pro-imperialist parties have firmly integrated themselves into the security apparatus and intelligence services at all levels. In halfheartedly raising the issue of Snowden's testimony, they take on the role of attempting to provide the German government's activities with a pseudo-democratic fig leaf, thereby playing their own role in the NSA cover-up committee.

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