

Ahead of election, Snowden reveals mass spying on New Zealanders

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On Monday evening 1,700 people crowded into Auckland's Town Hall to hear speeches by journalist Glenn Greenwald and, via video-link from Russia, whistleblower Edward Snowden. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange also made a video appearance from the Ecuadorean embassy in London.

According to the Internet Party, which organised the meeting, dubbed "The Moment of Truth," 800 more people had to be turned away due to lack of space. The event, held just five days before New Zealand's national election, was watched online by tens of thousands of people.

The speeches, along with articles published the same day by Snowden and Greenwald on the *Intercept* website, further exposed the mass surveillance of NZ citizens and residents by the spy agency, the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB).

Greenwald released documents revealing that "at some point in 2012 or early 2013" the US National Security Agency (NSA) and GCSB carried out an operation, code-named Speargun, which plugged into the undersea Southern Cross cable, which "carries the vast majority of Internet traffic between New Zealand and the rest of the world." This would also allow access to data from Australia, and via Australia to large parts of Asia.

Tapping into the cable gives the spy agencies access to enormous volumes of communications metadata and content, which can be viewed using the XKEYSCORE tool by all the agencies in the Five Eyes network (the US, NZ, Australia, Britain and Canada).

Snowden wrote that from his desk in Hawaii, where he worked as a NSA contractor until mid-2013, "I routinely came across the communications of New Zealanders." He stated that the GCSB agents "do not

merely *use* XKEYSCORE, but also actively and directly develop mass surveillance algorithms for it." He told the Auckland meeting that using the tool, "I can see everything. I can see what book you looked at on Amazon.com, I can see who you talked to, I can see who your friends on Facebook are, I can see the text messages you sent, I can read the emails you wrote."

Snowden also revealed that there are two NSA facilities in New Zealand, including one in Auckland. This is in addition to the secretive Waihopai spy base operated by the GCSB, which also gathers data on behalf of the US. Prime Minister John Key has denied the claim.

In an interview with TV3 on Saturday, Greenwald said he is preparing a further report showing that the GCSB spies "on a variety of countries on behalf of the United States," including "hostile" countries and "Western democracies."

The revelations from Snowden and Greenwald directly contradict repeated assurances by Key over the past year that the GCSB does not engage in mass surveillance. Last year, the National Party government admitted that the GCSB had illegally spied on at least 88 NZ residents and citizens, including multi-millionaire entrepreneur and Internet Party (IP) founder Kim Dotcom. Dotcom's mansion was raided by armed police in 2012 and he has since been fighting extradition to the US on charges of copyright infringement relating to his former website Megaupload.

In August 2013, the government passed laws to legalise spying on New Zealanders by the GCSB and increase its ability to access Internet communications. Thousands of people protested across the country against the laws.

Greenwald refuted Key's claims that the new laws

were “harmless.” He wrote that the NSA documents showed that “in high-level discussions between the Key government and the NSA, the new law was clearly viewed as the crucial means to empower the GCSB to engage in metadata surveillance.”

Key has attempted to dismiss the allegations of mass spying and has hurled abuse at Greenwald, describing him as a “loser” and a “henchman” for Dotcom. Key said the documents released by Greenwald merely showed a proposal for metadata gathering by the GCSB, which was never implemented. But Key has repeatedly refused to comment on Snowden’s evidence of the GCSB’s involvement with XKEYSCORE, which is nothing other than a mass surveillance tool.

Greenwald, Snowden and Assange have all performed valuable services by exposing the machinations and crimes of US imperialism and the establishment of the scaffolding for a police state in the US and other countries, including New Zealand. They have also shown considerable personal courage in the face of persecution by Washington and its allies.

However their attendance and speeches at last night’s meeting also revealed significant political limitations. For the IP and its ally, the Maori nationalist Mana Party, the purpose of the event was to boost their support in the election this Saturday. Snowden and Greenwald joined Dotcom and IP leader Laila Harre in calling for a vote to change the government—that is, to install the Labour Party supported by the Greens, the right-wing NZ First, the IP and Mana.

Greenwald admitted he had “spent very little time” studying NZ’s domestic political disputes, but said he was “thrilled that [Dotcom] ... is willing to support and fund a party ... devoted to defending Internet freedom and individual privacy and opposing mass surveillance.”

However the IP’s policy, like that of the Greens and Labour, merely calls for a “review” of the GCSB and other spy agencies—not their abolition. It calls for New Zealand to exit the Five Eyes network in order to exercise “sovereign control” over the intelligence agencies, so as to defend the country’s “national security” and “future interests.”

The IP is a pro-business party whose main objective is to reform copyright laws and establish other incentives for online businesses like Dotcom’s. It has no interest in dismantling the state’s repressive

apparatus.

Labour, for its part, is absolutely committed to the military-intelligence alliance with the US, including the GCSB’s relationship with the NSA. The 1999–2008 Labour government passed the GCSB Act in 2003, establishing the agency as a separate department. According to investigative journalist Nicky Hager, the agency’s funding increased by 150 percent in the decade following the September 11 attacks in 2001, mostly under the Labour government.

Labour was responsible for strengthening the alliance with the US by sending NZ troops to Afghanistan and Iraq. This included sending GCSB agents to work with the US spy agencies in Afghanistan, where they helped identify targets for airstrikes, according to Hager’s book *Other People’s Wars*.

In a deliberately vague statement, Labour leader David Cunliffe told TVNZ on Sunday that he would replace the current GCSB legislation with something “more protective of New Zealanders’ personal privacy.” Today Cunliffe stressed that he “would not” withdraw NZ from Five Eyes. He told the media that Labour’s “review” of the GCSB would be designed to “build public confidence” in the spy agency. Asked if he believed Snowden was a credible source, Cunliffe refused to comment.

Labour’s record was not mentioned by Harre, Dotcom or any of the speakers at the “Moment of Truth” event. Nor did the meeting discuss the purpose of the surveillance of the world’s population by the NSA and its partners: namely, as a pre-emptive measure to suppress opposition to imperialist war and deepening social inequality.



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