

Canada's top spy "watchdog" says Edward Snowden should be shot

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Michael Doucet—the director of the government “watchdog” agency tasked with ensuring the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) doesn’t violate Canadians’ rights—has publicly declared that US National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden should be shot.

Far from being an individual outburst, Doucet’s remarks exemplify broad sentiments within establishment circles. More than three years after Snowden lifted the veil on the NSA’s illegal activities, including the major role that Canada plays in the NSA-led “Five Eyes” global spy network, the Canadian ruling elite remains outraged at his exposures.

The head of the Security Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC), Doucet responded to a question at a recent talk he gave at Toronto’s Ryerson University on what Snowden’s fate would have been had he been Canadian by saying, “Do you want my opinion on that? Do you really want it? I’ll give it to you. If Edward Snowden had worked for CSIS and did what he did, he should be shot.”

Doucet’s outburst underscores the fraudulent character of the SIRC and like government “oversight” bodies charged with ensuring CSIS, Canada’s premier intelligence agency, and other parts of the national-security apparatus don’t violate Canadians’ civil liberties. Such “watchdogs” are in fact lapdogs—state bodies committed to defending, and covering up for, the police and intelligence agencies and upholding the capitalist social order.

The Liberal government response to Doucet’s inflammatory comments is no less revealing. Asked about them, Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale noted blandly, “That remark strikes me as highly inappropriate.”

Beyond this, there has been no official government response, let alone any suggestion that Doucet should be removed or otherwise sanctioned. Nor have the opposition parties seen fit to raise the issue. As for the corporate media, only the *Globe and Mail* reported Doucet’s remarks and Goodale’s tepid criticism of them.

The indifference among ruling circles to Doucet’s effective call for Snowden’s execution reflects the ruling elite’s general contempt for basic democratic rights. In the name of the “war on terror,” successive Liberal and Conservative governments have erected the framework of a police state over the past 15

years, including sanctioning the intelligence agencies to systematically spy on Canadians. They would rather see figures like Snowden, whose courageous actions brought some of the state’s illegal practices to public attention, silenced, or even eliminated, than lift a finger in defence of democratic rights.

No country’s national security apparatus is more closely integrated with that of the US than Canada’s. As a key Washington ally for over three quarters of a century, Ottawa is deeply implicated in US imperialism’s aggressive pursuit of its geostrategic interests around the world. Canada has participated in virtually every US-led war over the past two decades, is playing a major role in the US military-strategic offensives against Russia and China, and through the “Five Eyes” surveillance network both assists the Pentagon in its wars and helps monitor the political beliefs and activities of the world’s population.

In 2013, Snowden revealed that the Canadian Security Establishment (CSE), Ottawa’s signals intelligence agency, functions as a veritable arm of the NSA. This includes: assisting the NSA in developing surveillance programs; carrying out operations, especially in countries where US citizens have limited access; and training personnel. It also conducts economic spying to benefit Canadian corporate interests, as shown by Snowden’s revelation that CSE eavesdropped on mining companies active in Brazil.

Other documents revealed by Snowden provided evidence that the CSE systematically collects the metadata of Canadians’ electronic communications, a blatant violation of their constitutional rights, not to mention the mandate of CSE, which is authorized to spy only on foreign targets.

CSIS has been no less aggressive in its law-breaking activities. The domestic spy agency has been combing Canadians’ metadata since 2004 and has lied to the courts about its actions. Federal court judges have repeatedly chastised CSIS and CSE for deliberately withholding information from them.

Doucet, who is ostensibly the top watchdog tasked with holding CSIS to account, was himself deeply implicated in the CSE-NSA partnership and as such, no doubt, in the development of the mass surveillance of North Americans’ electronic communications and internet use. He told his student

audience that in the mid-2000s, when he worked for CSE, he served as the embedded liaison officer at NSA headquarters.

From the outset, Canada's ruling elite made no secret of its hostility to Snowden. Like all other Western governments, Canada refused to grant Snowden asylum, despite the fact that he faces almost certain execution or incarceration for life should he return to the United States. He currently resides in Moscow, where he was stranded in 2013 after the US made clear that it was determined to seize him. This included forcing down the Bolivian president's plane, because they believed it might be carrying Snowden to asylum in South America.

Canada's then foreign minister, John Baird, declared his full support for the US efforts to bring Snowden to "justice," publicly demanding Snowden surrender to US authorities. For his part, Jean-Pierre Plouffe, the government-appointed commissioner tasked with overseeing CSE's activities, denounced Snowden's exposures of the illegal activities of the NSA and CSE, saying they had led "to a lot of misinformation."

In his Ryerson appearance, Doucet continued in this vein, asserting that Snowden's actions had damaged "national security." Immediately following his declaration that Snowden deserves to be shot, Doucet claimed that if Snowden had concerns about the scope and legality of the NSA's spying he should have raised them with his superiors.

"(I)f he worked for CSIS, there are all the mechanisms there, as there were in the States, to raise the issues that he felt needed to be raised," claimed Doucet. "If he really cared about the US, the US system, he would have exhausted every avenue ... he would not have released so much information that would have placed Americans, allies and others in risk of harm."

This is a pack of lies. In the first place, the spying operations of the NSA, CSE and the "Five Eyes" alliance are not directed at safeguarding the population, but at upholding the predatory interests of US and Canadian imperialism and their British, Australian and New Zealand allies. Not Snowden, but the national security apparatus, which functions as a state within the state to spy on and suppress political opposition, constitutes the real threat to the population, as demonstrated by their systematic violation of basic democratic rights.

Second, bodies like SIRC and their counterparts in other countries have proven worse than useless at preventing the erection of a police state apparatus and the embrace of illegal surveillance methods by the agencies that they are supposed to oversee.

While Doucet boasts that in Canada "there are all the mechanisms" for would-be whistle-blowers to come forward, his call for Snowden's death (subsequently qualified to include his criminal prosecution) constitutes—to say the least—a chilling warning as to how the SIRC and Canadian elite would receive any internal complaints of illegal activities by the national security apparatus.

Since Snowden's revelations were made public, the Canadian

ruling class has further strengthened the repressive powers of its state. In 2015 the Conservatives and Liberals collaborated to ram through parliament legislation (Bill C-51) that guts privacy protections, creates a new "speech crime" of "promoting terrorism," and empowers CSIS to break virtually any law when "disrupting" vaguely-defined threats to national security.

Although they ensured Bill C-51's speedy passage, the Liberals, recognizing it was highly unpopular, promised during last fall's election campaign that they would amend it. Predictably, this promise has proven to be a fraud. To date, the only amendment they have introduced is to create a parliamentary oversight committee, a move, which as the populations of Britain and the United States can testify, will do nothing to hinder the intelligence agencies' illegal mass surveillance.

The silence of the smaller opposition parties, the New Democrats, Bloc Quebecois, and Greens, on Doucet's call for Snowden's execution should come as no surprise. All of the established parties accept the "war on terror" narrative as good coin and refuse to challenge the intelligence agencies' practices.

The muted reaction to Doucet's comments underscore that as the deepening capitalist crisis heightens already explosive social tensions, the ruling elite is preparing to use the most ruthless measures to suppress opposition to its program of austerity and imperialist war. Earlier this month, Liberal Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr revealed the government is ready to use the military to suppress "non-peaceful" anti-pipeline protests.

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