

One Year of Edward Snowden's Revelations

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Thursday marked one year since evidence of the US government's mass surveillance programs first began appearing in the Guardian newspaper. Through installments over the ensuing months, whistleblower Edward Snowden has revealed the existence of a government operation aimed at collecting, storing and trawling through the personal and political communications of the American people and countless millions more around the world.

The international surveillance apparatus Snowden has uncovered is more powerful than any in history. Billions of emails, phone calls, texts, videoconference and webcam recordings, facial images and credit card records are collected with the help of large corporations such as Verizon, Google and Yahoo. Both the metadata and content of communications are stored and can be accessed without a warrant. This allows the surveillance agencies to draw social and political profiles of every person in the US and hundreds of millions of people beyond America's borders.

Snowden has leaked documents showing that the National Security Agency (NSA) spies not only on individuals, but also on governments and government leaders ("allies" and enemies alike); international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union and NATO; and foreign corporations. The United States government is the world's biggest practitioner of cyber warfare, hacking into the communications of China, Iran and many other countries.

The detailed exposure of the colossal scope and universal character of the American Big Brother operation renders utterly absurd the official claims of a "limited" and "narrowly focused" program motivated by the need to protect the American "homeland" against terrorists. The continued promotion of this obvious lie by the intelligence agencies, the White House, and their enablers in Congress and the judiciary is an insult to the intelligence of the people.

Since the first revelations were published a year ago, the reality of an emerging police state run by unelected intelligence spooks and military brass, lurking behind the threadbare and impotent trappings of democracy, has been thoroughly exposed. The real target of this repressive apparatus—which enables the state to draw up "enemies lists" of people to be seized and eliminated in the event of social upheavals that threaten the interests of the ruling class—is not foreign jihadists (with whom the US government collaborates in Syria, Libya and other places around the world), but the working class.

This blanket surveillance is patently illegal and unconstitutional. It is precisely the type of "unreasonable" operation proscribed by the US Constitution's Fourth Amendment, which

states that “the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrant shall issue, but upon probable cause...”

Nevertheless, one year after the first Snowden revelations, none of these programs has ended or been limited. They remain in place, while President Obama, in the name of reform, has moved to more firmly institutionalize them.

Public opposition remains broad and intense. Months of lies about the supposedly harmless and legal character of the programs, combined with relentless attacks on Snowden by the government and the media, have not succeeded in eroding popular support for the whistleblower. But the views of the people mean nothing to those who wield economic and political power.

Hardly less revealing than the programs themselves has been the official response to their exposure. Since day one, there has been virtually no call from the media or either of the two major parties for the termination of these programs or the impeachment and prosecution of the officials, beginning with the president, responsible for authorizing and implementing them.

On the contrary, with only the rarest of exceptions, the newspapers, networks, pundits and politicians rounded against Snowden. Rather than hailing the courageous and principled response by the young man to massive violations of the democratic rights of the people, these forces denounced Snowden as a traitor and a criminal, while absolving the real criminals.

In a continuation of the Obama administration’s policy towards prior whistleblowers such as WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and WikiLeaks leaker Bradley (Chelsea) Manning, the Obama administration charged Snowden with three counts of violating the Espionage Act of 1917.

Snowden’s passport was revoked and his physical safety threatened. In July, the administration forced down the airplane of Bolivian President Evo Morales in an attempt to capture Snowden. Snowden was forced to accept an offer of temporary asylum in Russia.

Assassination was publicly discussed as an option amongst military and intelligence operatives. In October, former NSA director Michael Hayden talked about putting Snowden on an Obama administration “kill list.”

Those professionally or personally affiliated with the revelations have been subjected to police repression. In July, British intelligence forced the *Guardian* to destroy hard drives and threatened the newspaper with closure. In August, police detained David Miranda, the partner of *Guardian* reporter Glenn Greenwald, for nine hours at London’s Heathrow Airport. His belongings—including his computer—were illegally searched and seized.

The threats and lies continue to this day. Last week, Secretary of State John Kerry responded to Snowden’s interview with NBC News by demanding that he “man up” and hand himself over to the US “justice system.” Kerry told NBC’s Chuck Todd, “Edward Snowden is a coward. He is a traitor. And he has betrayed his country.”

The ruling elite is terrified of the emergence of Snowden, who exemplifies a broader political radicalization of millions of young people. Born in 1983, he speaks for a significant section of

a generation that has experienced nothing but political reaction and the ever more bloody eruption of American militarism. Key milestones include the stolen election of 2000, the “war on terror,” the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Abu Ghraib, the expansion of the police powers of the state and assault on democratic rights (Patriot Act, Homeland Security, Guantanamo, etc.) and the ever more obscene growth of social inequality.

One year after the Snowden revelations began, what political conclusions are to be drawn?

The creation of a totalitarian spying operation is not a temporary departure that can be corrected by palliatives or appeals for reform. The erection of these programs is a response by the ruling class—not just in the United States, but internationally—to the deepest needs of a capitalist system in mortal crisis. That the Snowden revelations include the exposure of similar programs in Britain, Australia, Canada, Germany, France—in fact, every major capitalist “democracy”—demonstrates that the assault on democratic rights is rooted in the existing social and economic order.

In particular, it is linked to the malignant growth of social inequality and militarism, both of which have been exacerbated by the global breakdown of capitalism that began in 2008.

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