

Whistleblower Edward Snowden charged with Espionage

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On Friday evening, the Obama administration announced that it had filed three charges under seal on June 14 in US District Court in Alexandria, Virginia. The charges are stealing government property, unauthorized communication of national defense information, and willful communication of classified information.

These charges carry, in aggregate, a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison. In the course of any indictment, however, additional charges can be added. Prominent Democrats and Republicans have denounced Snowden for “treason,” an offense that carries a potential death sentence.

Since Snowden’s initial revelations of massive and illegal government spying on millions of people in the US and around the world, the American ruling class, abetted by the media, has carried out a systematic campaign of vilification. After revealing himself to be the source of leaks to the *Guardian* and *Washington Post* concerning secret National Security Agency (NSA) spying programs, Snowden has gone into hiding, quite justifiably fearing for his safety.

There is not a shred of legitimacy in the charges against Snowden. He is not a criminal. He is an individual who, at immense personal risk, has sought to reveal to the population of the United States and the world a state conspiracy against the democratic rights of the people.

The real criminals are the accusers. No amount of mudslinging or lies can cover up the criminality that Snowden has exposed. The young whistleblower is being charged as a spy for revealing the biggest spying operation in American history.

The documents released to date by Snowden expose spying programs that seize the records of all phone calls made in the US, allowing the government to quickly determine the social and political connections of every person in the country. Other programs intercept and store billions of Internet communications, which are made accessible without a warrant to US spy agencies.

These programs directly violate the Fourth Amendment to the US Constitution, which bans warrantless searches and seizures.

On Friday, the day the charges were filed, the *Guardian* reported new documents showing that the UK government is directly accessing the communications, emails, Facebook messages and Internet history of tens of millions of people for examination by government agencies in both the United States and Britain.

These revelations show that top government officials in both countries—including President Obama himself—have lied deliberately and repeatedly. There is more than enough evidence for impeachment proceedings.

The government has rushed to extradite and jail or kill Snowden because it knows he has thus far revealed only a portion of the vast police state apparatus it is concealing from the population.

The administration bringing espionage charges is the same administration that kills American citizens without warrant or trial, indefinitely detains prisoners without due process, and spies on the communications of the press and the public.

In being charged under the reactionary Espionage Act, Snowden joins other targets of state repression such as Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, Victor Berger, Jacob Abrams, Daniel Ellsberg, Anthony Russo, Thomas Drake and Bradley Manning. He is the seventh person to be tried for espionage by the Obama administration—more than all previous administrations combined.

Underlying the assault on democratic rights in the United States are powerful historical and social processes. Democratic forms of rule are not compatible with endless war and historically unprecedented levels of social inequality.

In preparation for mass working class opposition to its reactionary policies, the American ruling class, under the cover of the bogus “war on terror,” is effectively declaring the US Constitution and its Bill of Rights null and void.

The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* call on workers and youth to come to the defense of Snowden, along with Bradley Manning, who is currently facing potentially capital charges of “aiding the enemy,” and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has been taking refuge for more than a year in the Ecuadorian embassy in Britain.

All sections of the political and media establishment—“liberal” and conservative, Democratic and Republican—have joined in witch-hunting Snowden and defending the NSA, CIA and Pentagon. Their complete indifference to massive violations of constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties underscores the absence of any serious commitment to democratic rights within the ruling class.

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