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Latest Snowden revelations expose Obama's lies on NSA spy programs

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Bill Van Auken

Just hours after receiving a report from his hand-picked advisory panel on National Security Agency surveillance operations, President Barack Obama used his end of the year press conference Friday to deliver an Orwellian defense of unrestrained US spying both at home and abroad.

“I have confidence that the NSA is not engaging in domestic surveillance and snooping around,” Obama said, despite the cascade of revelations proving just the opposite. These revelations, including the latest from former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, have established that the agency is collecting and storing billions of files recording the phone calls, text messages, emails, Internet searches and even the daily movements of virtually every US citizen, not to mention those of hundreds of millions of people abroad.

“The United States is a country that abides by rule of law, that cares deeply about privacy, that cares deeply about civil liberties,” he added. Who, at this late juncture, does the American president think he’s fooling? One only has to read the ruling by a Washington, DC Federal District Court judge—which was then stayed in the interest of “national security”—finding the

surveillance methods of the NSA to be “almost Orwellian,” and its activities unconstitutional, i.e., criminal.

On Snowden, without whose courageous actions the NSA’s illegal activities would still be concealed from the public, Obama refused to address calls to grant him amnesty, insisting, falsely, that he has been indicted, and that his fate is in the hands of the US attorney general and the courts.

Nonetheless, he charged that Snowden’s revelations had given a “pretty distorted view of what’s going on out there,” by which he meant that they cut through Washington’s propaganda about the US representing a beacon of freedom and democracy, exposing the infrastructure of a police state at the heart of the government.

Declaring that the furor unleashed by Snowden’s disclosures represented an “important conversation we needed to have,” Obama added, “the way in which these disclosures happened have been damaging to the United States, damaging to our intelligence capabilities. And I think that there was a way for us to have this conversation without that damage.”

What way that was the US president did not specify. Undoubtedly within the intelligence apparatus, the preferred method would have been to assassinate Snowden before he could leak a single document. The fact is that there would have been no “conversation” without the actions taken by Snowden, because neither the NSA, nor the president, nor the Congress was about to expose to the American people and the people of the world the massive conspiracy being mounted against their fundamental democratic rights.

On one question, Obama remained silent. The decision handed down by Judge Richard Leon in Washington on Monday referred to “the utter lack of evidence that a terrorist attack has ever been prevented” through the dragnet surveillance being carried out by the NSA.” Similarly, the report issued by Obama’s own advisory panel three days later concluded that “the information contributed to terrorist investigations by the use of . . . telephony metadata was not essential to preventing attacks.” In other words, the pretext provided repeatedly by Obama and US intelligence officials—that the massive spying was required to keep the American people “safe”—was a lie.

Asked point blank whether he could “identify any specific examples” in which the NSA spying program had contributed to the foiling of an act of terrorism, Obama failed to provide any.

Given that the sweeping domestic and international spying operation has not proved useful in this regard, the obvious question is what interests is it intended to serve?

One answer to this question was indicated in secret documents leaked by Snowden and reported on by the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and *Der Spiegel* on Friday, showing that among 1,000

targets of the NSA and its British partner, the General Communications Headquarters, were Joaquin Almunia, the European Union's competition commissioner and current European Commission vice president. Almunia was involved in pursuing charges of commercial and financial abuse against US corporations such as Google, Microsoft, the pharmaceutical conglomerate Johnson & Johnson and financial giants such as Citigroup and J.P. Morgan Chase.

Other targets included the French defense contractor Thales, the Paris-based energy giant Total, European telecom companies and the heads of oil and finance ministries. This is in line with earlier revelations of NSA spying on Brazil's state-owned energy firm, Petrobras.

In the face of outraged denunciations of industrial espionage by the European Union and others, the NSA attempted to deny the obvious. "We do not use our foreign intelligence capabilities to steal the trade secrets of foreign companies on behalf of—or give intelligence we collect to—U.S. companies to enhance their international competitiveness or increase their bottom line," said an agency spokeswoman Friday.

She quickly added, however, that economic spying is essential "to providing policy makers with the information they need to make informed decisions that are in the best interest of our national security." In other words, if the NSA doesn't directly pass intelligence to Citigroup, Google, Exxon Mobil and others, it is giving it to other government officials who do.

What emerges is a state intelligence apparatus of genuine totalitarian dimensions that acts as a direct partner of giant corporations—that in turn willingly cooperate with the NSA's illegal operations—while spying relentlessly on the masses of people.

Underlying this development is social structure that has turned increasingly aristocratic in character, with a narrow financial and corporate oligarchy having amassed an unprecedented share of the country's wealth, while living in fear that the glaring levels of social inequality will spark a revolt from below. There exists within this ruling layer, and the Democratic and Republican parties that defend its interests, no constituency for democratic rights. Rather it strongly supports authoritarian methods to suppress growing opposition among working people.

Under the phony cover of the "war on terror"—and in the real context of endless war abroad—the US government under Obama has arrogated to itself vast powers to spy on the entire population, subject its perceived enemies to indefinite military detention and even summarily kill anyone, including US citizens, without due process.

The threat of police state dictatorship emerges more clearly with each passing day. The struggle against this threat is fundamentally a class question. The only social force that has a life-and-death interest in democratic rights is the working class, which historically has secured these rights through mass struggles.

Today these rights cannot be defended through the courts, the Democratic Party or any section of the government and its auxiliary agencies. Rather the working class must mobilize its own independent political strength, based upon a socialist program, to put an end to the capitalist profit system, the source of the drive to a police state. This means, above all, building the Socialist Equality Party.