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USA :

Obama's spy methods exposed by Snowden

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President Obama's well-publicized May 23 speech to the nation was aimed at moderating the present U.S. dictum that the country is and should remain in a never-ending state of war—that is, the undeclared, undefined “war on terror.”

This “war,” codified since 9-11 in the Patriot Act and the associated Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, has been routinely reaffirmed and expanded in scope by the Obama administration. It has been routinely employed to justify endless National Security Agency, FBI, and a myriad of other public and private government-funded spy operations that violate with impunity democratic rights and civil liberties at home and justify real wars abroad in which the Pentagon and privatized mercenary Blackwater-type death squads murder oppressed people around the world. Indeed, close to half of the U.S.-paid armed forces operating in Afghanistan today—hundreds of thousands of trained killers and their back-up operatives—function as private mercenary armies.

Judging that perhaps some embarrassing excesses have been committed in this “perpetual” state of war, President Obama suggested that the “Authorization for Use of Military Force” measures approved by Congress after the Sept. 11, 2001, bombings committed by Egyptian terrorists, might be modified a bit to avoid “keeping America on a perpetual wartime footing.”

He added, “Unless we discipline our thinking and our actions, we may be drawn into more wars we don't need to fight, or continue to grant presidents unbound powers more suited for traditional armed conflicts between nation states.” The latter, as we all are supposed to understand, are being “phased out.” We can only assume, therefore, that the trillion-dollar annual military budget will be largely restricted to America's “non-traditional,” daily wars conducted around the world largely in secret!

The Obama speech was laden with tedious and moralizing platitudes devoid of a single specific measure to remedy the avalanche of crude, brutal, illegal, unconstitutional, racist and even genocidal measures that today define the daily ruling-class policies and practices of a declining social order. The president's speech was prompted by recent revelations that one or more of his spy agencies had wiretapped the home, office, and cell phones of some 20 Associated Press reporters and previously their counterparts in The New York Times.

The “humble” and posturing president also suggested that he and his successors might be restricted a tad in utilizing the present “kill list” to murder suspected terrorists, and that ways might even be found to limit torture and indefinite detention with regard to the hunger-strikers at the imperial U.S. military base in Guantanamo, Cuba. These prisoners have been held for years without charges, access to attorneys, or any other form of due process—and often have been subjected to torture.

Obama discussed only his short list of possible government transgressions, while promising to ask their very perpetrators, as if he himself was guiltless, to investigate themselves! Virtually absent from the president's discourse were references to the vast array of blatant violations of fundamental rights that any “democratic” society would take for granted.

There was no mention of ongoing FBI threats to fine internet companies who refuse to install devices in their equipment to facilitate government surveillance of every person in the country. That such devices are operative is beyond doubt, but we are told that the acquired information is funneled into some “non-government-associated” holding apparatus accessible only when permission is granted by some secret government oversight body—to be sure, one “sworn” to protect our constitutional rights from people or institutions like the president, the NSA, the FBI,

and all the others who might be tempted to abuse them.

Snowden: The spy who came in from the cold

To the great embarrassment of Obama and his posturing co-conspirators at every level of government, within days of his "pledge of openness" speech, the lid was blown off any and all pretence of democratic functioning in the U.S. This took place when a 29-year-old former CIA intelligence technician, Edward Joseph Snowden, currently employed at Booz Allen Hamilton, a multi-billion-dollar government-contracted spy agency, publicly announced what no one could deny—that he was the source of the British Guardian and Washington Post revelations during the previous week.

Snowden disclosed secret and longstanding FISA court orders demanding that virtually all of the nation's internet providers—including Yahoo, Microsoft, Paytalk, AOL, Apple, Facebook, Skype and YouTube—allow for the unprecedented, secretly conducted, and ongoing government sweep of phone calls, audio and video chats, e-mails, photographs, documents, connection logs, and other communications used daily by American citizens.

The government spy program, code-named Prism, supposedly allowed corporations like Apple Computer to officially deny that they were the "direct" source that inspected the information or allowed immediate government access to it. They could point out instead that they served as merely a conduit that funneled all such information into Prism. In all, the whistleblowers reported that the NSA collects phone records on 3 billion private communications per day!

The leader of the Senate Foreign Intelligence Committee, Diane Feinstein, blithely dismissed the revelations entirely, insisting that since they were FISA court-ordered—that is, issued by a secret court with virtually no government oversight—they were perfectly legal. Feinstein did indicate that some unnamed government officials had been "briefed" on the matter.

While government officials also retorted that all three branches of government had "signed off" on the telephone spying, a top ACLU official, Anthony Romero, denounced the program as a fundamental violation of civil liberties, saying, "A pox on all three houses of government," regardless of what hidden approval devices were employed.

Another just-released 18-page presidential memo has Obama, according to Glenn Greenwald and Ewen MacAskill, writing in The Guardian, ordering intelligence officials to "draw up a list for potential overseas targets for U.S. cyber attacks." This never-published October 2012 Presidential Policy Directive 20 states that Offensive Cyber Effects Operations "can offer unique and unconventional capabilities to advance U.S. national objectives around the world with little or no warning to the adversary or target and with potential effects ranging from subtle to severely damaging." The same objectives can be perpetrated within the U.S., says Obama's directive, but only with prior orders from the president, except in cases of "emergency."

This alone should cause some anxiety among activists who might suffer under the illusion that Facebook and other such social media devices can function as a permanent democratic instrument to challenge capitalist abuse and power and organize mass opposition. With a push of the government's "emergency" button, these new and undoubtedly valuable but ultimately limited forms of communication can expected to be shut down in an instant.

And thus, in a matter of days, the Obama administration's effort to posture as defenders of civil liberties went up in flames, and the police-state-type mechanisms that had been meticulously put into place and illegally used for more than seven years, officially, were exposed around the world. What a small layer of political activists had justifiably

taken for granted for decades and longer is now the public knowledge of millions” and exposed by a handful of leakers who will inevitably face severe government persecution. How could it be otherwise?

Mushrooming spy apparatus

Edward Snowden was one of some 1.4 million intelligence technicians, operatives, security specialists, or just plain spies who have earned “after the minimum of a one-year investigation” top-level national security classification status. Moreover, all of these individuals work for a mushrooming number of government and privatized spy agencies charged with collecting data from every conceivable source. Indeed, the very rivalry between many of these agencies has fueled internal debates as to whether or not their efforts should be coordinated and the results “shared” to increase their efficiency and avoid duplication of effort.

It was these very “sharing” concerns that allowed Snowden, a relatively low-level employee at Booz Allen who specialized in such technical coordination, to gain access to the data of multiple agencies and their associated collections of government-classified documents. As with Bradley Manning’s leaks of millions of pages of classified “dirty-op” material to Julian Assange’s WikiLeaks “including the release of videotapes of deliberate murder” this once again reveals that capitalism recognizes no limits when it comes to advancing its interests.

Here it is critical to state that Snowden’s revelations, the magnitude of which have yet to be determined, go far beyond the unprecedented spy network daily used against American citizens in violations of their right to privacy, free speech, and association. It is highly probable that Snowden’s computers, four or five of which he is reported to keep in his possession at all times, contain classified material that includes the illegal U.S. spy operations conducted against virtually all nations on earth. This material ranges from military secrets to private-sector intellectual property and data on scientific breakthroughs that relate to key aspects of capitalist production and trade, to documents of the very government and private banking institutions that collectively constitute the core operations of all U.S. rivals.

Snowden has now been charged under the Espionage Act with at least three violations, which would total some 30 years in prison, assuming he is extradited, indicted, and convicted. The government is looking for other avenues to persecute this bright and conscience-driven youth, who has little or no previous political experience. Major pressure was exerted on the Chinese government to extradite Snowden from Hong Kong, where he was reportedly in hiding with fears for his very life at the hands of U.S. operatives. The Chinese government was in no hurry to accede to the barrage of U.S. demands, especially when it learned from Snowden’s revelations that it too had been subjected to illegal U.S. spy operations. Undaunted, the courageous Snowden continues to release swaths of illegal and secret U.S. government spy operations, creating an unprecedented nightmare for Obama and the U.S. government.

It is interesting to note here that both Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden state that they took care to not release material that might cause harm to U.S. spies or otherwise directly jeopardize their operations, a form of innocent self-censorship in this writer’s view, that they perhaps believed might limit government efforts to lock them in jail forever “if not worse. This distinction was also employed by the Washington Post and other media who in the past, as with The New York Times’s 1971 release of the Pentagon Papers and the more recent Wikileaks material, actually submitted the materials they received for prior government perusal “that is, censorship.

In the case of the corporate media, it is simply a matter of doing the bidding of the U.S. ruling elite while attempting to maintain the semblance of a “free press” at the same time. A 1996 Times article noted that the Pentagon Papers, which revealed secret U.S. operations in Vietnam over the course of some 25 years, “demonstrated, among other things, that the Lyndon Baines Johnson Administration had systematically lied, not only to the public but also to Congress, about a subject of transcendent national interest and significance.” The Pentagon Papers, were not

declassified and publicly released until June 2011, that is, some 40 years after they were first leaked by RAND Corporation top-level military analyst and former Pentagon military specialist, Daniel Ellsberg.

The prosecution and punishment of the leakers remains a top priority, with government officials already investigating how to inflict the greatest harm to Glenn Greenwald, one of the country's most democratically minded bloggers and the British Guardian reporter who first exposed this most recent wholesale violation of fundamental rights. Greenwald has toured the country and the world for years warning of the dangers of today's unchecked surveillance and the resulting criminal acts perpetrated in the name of national security. This includes a national tour last year, when Greenwald minced no words in damning the government's persecution of 700,000 members of the U.S. Muslim community since 9-11.

These latest revelations are but the tip of the iceberg. It is only a matter of time until the thousands and more of the millions of U.S. spies "come in from the cold" to expose the daily police-state measures, engineered wars, and mass murders that constitute a key portion of ruling-class policy today. What Snowden has revealed with regard to government spying differs little from the ever-deepening coordinated military-police measures being put into place in preparation for quelling the massive protests the ruling elite fully expect as their ongoing austerity measures inflict deepening misery on U.S. workers.

National security is ruling-class security

Obama's backfired and bungled plan to defuse public outrage before the recent internet exposés left out the 99.9 percent of his administration's daily and heinous offenses. The president declined to explain, for example, why he has all but pledged to sign on to the deadly Keystone XL Pipeline project. But "White House and State Department officials," according to the May 5 New York Times, "insist a pipeline ruling will be made strictly on whether the 1,700-mile project [from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico] is in the economic, environmental and security interests of the United States."

"Oil wars" too are routinely justified on "national security" grounds, as are military coups, "energy independence through fracking, off-shore and Alaskan tundra drilling," "regime change," and now the pipeline aimed at transporting tar sands and other deadly fossil fuel material whose continued use spells doom for all humanity.

The president declined to explain why it is today the norm for corporate lobbyists like Citigroup's and other private top banking specialists to write their own legislation to soften financial regulations to their advantage. The May 24 New York Times reports: "In a sign of Wall Street's resurgent influence [an understatement if there ever was one] in Washington, Citigroup's recommendations were reflected in more than 70 lines of the House committee's 85-line bill. Two crucial paragraphs, prepared by Citigroup in conjunction with other Wall Street banks, were copied nearly word for word."

Of course, the fact that these same corporations write the tax codes to exclude 70 percent of all businesses from federal taxation, the latest example being the Apple Computer Corporation, went without comment from the "democratically minded" president. To be sure, protecting and expanding the profits and global competitiveness of American multi-nationals against all comers is always capitalism's prime directive and therefore its prime "national security" justification, as was the case with the Microsoft Corporation 15 years ago when the U.S. Supreme Court formally trashed historic anti-monopoly legislation to guarantee Microsoft's supremacy in the U.S. and on world markets.

Drone bombings defend “national security”

There was little specific mention in Obama's oration on the drone bombings that have to date taken the lives of almost 5000 civilians around the world, including a number of Americans in foreign countries deemed to be “terrorist suspects” and killed by some remote satellite-guided drone operator halfway around the world. The president did suggest that perhaps the Pentagon, rather than the CIA, might be assigned to drone warfare, thus leaving the CIA free to focus on perhaps more important objectives, including economic and military espionage.

Stealing corporate secrets, patents, research, and “intellectual property rights” of America's corporate competitors—an activity always considered fair game in today's thus-far mostly non-military competition for global economic domination, ranks high in top corporate circles. To be accurate, Obama did pledge that drone “signature strikes” would perhaps now continue with some vaguely-stated congressional or secret “public oversight,” as opposed to the present criteria of murdering people because they live in a region alleged to be in the vicinity of “terrorist operations.” The latter are defined as any that challenge the ongoing U.S. wars and interventions against their countries.

As in the decade of the Vietnam War, where the unofficial U.S. objective was, perhaps humorously stated, to “teach the Vietnamese not to invade the land that they were born in,” a war that slaughtered four million Vietnamese, terrorists are defined as anyone who opposes U.S. occupations and the rape of their country. In decades past this included the South African forces of the African National Congress, today the governing party of that nation.

To be sure, Iraq and Afghanistan were excluded from the president's new and non-specific guidelines because these are “real wars,” as compared to Pakistan, where thousands of civilian drone murders have been systematically documented even though the U.S. is not “officially” at war in that country. Given this “fact,” the U.S. admits to no drone killings there, a fiction necessary to maintain a semblance of credibility—that is, to everyone except the Pakistani victims.

The use of surveillance drones to daily spy on American citizens was excluded—at least for the time being by the “democratic” chief of state. Again, maintaining the fiction of U.S. capitalist democracy at home still concerns U.S. policy makers, although this fiction stands exposed today more than ever as a crude fraud. The most recent revelations include evidence of the use of drones for U.S. domestic surveillance.

The FBI's subpoenaing 24 members of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization to appear before a Chicago Grand Jury investigating terrorism tells us that the now officially-admitted spying on virtually the entire nation will be accompanied by persecution and imprisonment of social activists merely because of their political views. This attack on a socialist organization, the first in a generation, and on a group prominently involved in the U.S. antiwar movement and in the leadership of the broadly representative United National Antiwar Coalition, is an ominous sign that worse is to come. The list of antiwar and social justice organizations that have reported and proven government and police surveillance is ever increasing.

On the trade-union front, Obama neglected to explain why top government officials threatened to use the military to break strikes by the Longview, Wash., longshore strikers last year and in the not-so-recent past, when the striking ILWU was threatened with “national security” injunctions and the use of Navy crane operators to break a West Coast ILWU strike.

The monstrous persecution of “whistle blowers” like Bradley Manning—who exposed hundreds of thousands of pages of illegal government spying around the world as well as revealing videotape proof of the conscious murder of U.S. and foreign journalists, as well as civilians, by U.S. helicopter pilots who followed orders to gun down the

innocentâ€”never made the president's list of democratic concerns. Persecuting the truth tellers rather than the murderers is standard U.S. policyâ€”necessary, again, to defend the “national security” interests of the U.S. elite.

The shattering of fundamental constitutional rights is today commonplace in today's legal system. In the name of the war on terror, attorney-client confidentiality has been eliminated via “legalized” electronic surveillance. In the case of Lynne Stewart her private government-taped conversations with her client, Sheik Omar Abdel Rachman, were introduced in court as evidence against herâ€”yet another example of trashing democratic rights in the fake war on terrorism.

Persecution of immigrants and Muslims

Obama also declined to mention that his administration has deported more immigrants, 300,000-plus over each of the past three years, than any administration in historyâ€”criminalizing, again in the name of national security, the poorest sectors of the working class, who labor most often at sub-minimum wages to satiate agri-business and other corporate requirements to remain competitive in world markets.

Furthermore, the Obama administration is using the immigration system to expand surveillance of the entire U.S. population. A FOIA request submitted by immigrant rights groups in 2011 revealed that Secure Communities, a program used to deport immigrants through the jail system, is the precursor of a national biometric database called Next Generation Identification, which is currently being developed by the FBI. And the latest immigration reform proposal expands E-verify to cover all workers in the U.S. Soon everyone could be required to show a biometric ID when applying for any job. Its clear from these few examples that attacks on immigrants are attacks on all workers.

Since 9-11 the ever-expanding Homeland Security apparatus has investigated more than 700,000 Muslims, again with the “justification” that this community represents a threat to the nation's “national security.” There were no Obama apologies for these blatantly racist persecutions, as there are none for the “stop and frisk” legislation wherein hundreds of thousands of Black and Brown working people are daily harassed, persecuted, and jailed. The U.S. today imprisons the largest number and percentage of its population than any nation on earth. It ranks first as well in the number of executions, in both cases the majority victims of Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans.

With regard to his just admitted, and still unpunished, and therefore impliedly justified, civil liberties incursions, Obama pledged “to strike an appropriate balance [sometime in the future] between our need for security and preserving those freedoms that make us who we are.” His contemplated formation of an “independent board” to preserve civil liberties, as if the myriad of Constitutional/Bill of Rights protections and the entire system of judges and juries sworn to defend them were no longer adequate to guarantee these rights, is more than ironic.

These measures signal that the U.S. ruling class has been well aware of the massive mobilizations of workers around the world who have gone to new lengths to challenge the austerity measures imposed on them by a failing world capitalism that has no choice but to resolve its contradictions at the expense of the great majority. This includes the increased use of force, violence, and repression in its multiple forms to thwart the inevitable concerted fightbacks ahead.

Preparation for deepening repression

While the elite purport to use their police and military powers to rule with the assent of the masses rather than

through compulsion, the latter is their ultimate weapon. When the 99 percent begin to take the fightback road in earnest and bring forth experienced and revolutionary-minded leaders deeply imbedded in the social movements to mobilize hundreds of millions to defend their interests, the measures for police state repression in preparation today will be unleashed with a fury not seen in generations.

Americans today do live in a government-defined "national security" state—and in a police state of sorts as well. The ever refined and well-honed measures in progress, at least partially hidden from public view, are prerequisite institutions to enforce minority rule—with a vengeance when necessary. This has always been the case, varying in intensity according to the times and needs of the oppressing minority to retain its rule and power with the least possible opposition from the great mass of the working-class population.

Today's national security state will meet its match only when a mass democratic and revolutionary response in numbers and with an intensity far beyond the control of any government repression takes the road to challenge every and all aspects of the capitalist state power.

Pipe dream, you say? The state is invincible, you say? I beg to differ, but not from the vantage point of my admitted revolutionary optimism. The history of every society that has ever existed demonstrates that every tyrant and every repressive social order has fallen to the massive mobilization of the oppressed. None, however powerful, however heinous, however well armed and organized to eliminate all challenges, have beaten this historic law of human development.

We need not recount the lessons of every nation and pre-nation on earth, all of which mark their histories with the dates when the many defeated the few. The most recent example that is familiar to Americans is the Vietnam War. Here the world witnessed a confrontation between the world's most well-armed super-power and one of the poorest nations on earth. The 10-year U.S war, was waged by a country whose corporate media pilloried the Vietnamese as terrorists—not to mention as uncivilized "gooks" and communists. It was a country whose spy apparatus was unmatched anywhere, that routinely used poisons and napalm bombs to strip the jungle foliage along the Ho Chi Minh trail, that maintained a force of 500,000 ground troops, and that sought to justify its genocide in the name of "fighting for democracy."

On the Vietnamese side stood a peasant army whose organized contingents never exceeded 50,000 fighters, who lacked any air power at all for 99 percent of the war and who used bamboo snares and booby traps against the world's most sophisticated armaments. The Vietnamese received a pittance of doled-out aid from the former Soviet Union while the Chinese Stalinist government headed by Mao Tse-tung fêted the warmongering U.S. President Richard Nixon in Beijing after he had extended the war to North Vietnam. The Vietnamese had no navy, while the U.S. possessed the world's most powerful navy and mined Vietnam's harbors with impunity.

Yet the U.S. lost the war. In its last days the world's media was compelled to televise the panicked helicopter evacuation from Saigon of the last contingents of U.S. troops and their handful of complicit Vietnamese agents and hangers-on who had staked their future on a U.S. victory. And this was in the face of the victorious army of the Vietnamese people marching unimpeded and triumphantly into the South's capital, Saigon.

But it was far from the Vietnamese army and people alone that won this victory for self-determination. The U.S. soldiers had lost the will to continue to fight a war that the whole world condemned as immoral, illegal, racist, and genocidal. The American youth who were drafted to do the fighting—in great part Blacks, Puerto Ricans and other Latinos, and working-class whites—came to see the war as criminal in every respect.

They took no pride in following orders to raze entire villages and indiscriminately murder women and children.

Indeed, increasing numbers refused to do so; they shot the officers who ordered them to become murderers, or wounded themselves sufficiently to be sent home from the slaughter. Hundreds of thousands joined in, at first as individuals and then in uniform, to lead the unprecedented antiwar protests whose numbers began in the hundreds, then thousands, and ended in the regular periodic and coordinated mobilizations of millions.

By the war's end, polls showed that 75 percent of the American people supported the demand for the immediate and total withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Vietnam and Southeast Asia, where the U.S. war had spread to Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia.

The antiwar movement cut deep into the fabric of U.S. society. What began as a movement led by small groups of revolutionaries—near underground victims of the still virulent McCarthy-era witch-hunt era who were compelled to hide their political identities—ended in a mass movement, perhaps the first in U.S. history, that unabashedly challenged an imperialist war in progress. Whistleblowers appeared in the millions in the form of U.S. soldiers—even military officers—who told the truth about the genocidal policies that were the daily routine during the Vietnam War and in fact, during every imperialist and colonial war ever fought.

Antiwar sentiment became deeply rooted in the trade unions, whose compliant Cold War-era bureaucrats initially backed the war with patriotic pandering to the warmakers. In the end, the ranks could not be denied, and millions of organized workers protested the slaughter in mass protests and even in some antiwar strike actions, where for the first time in memory, millions declared a “Moratorium” on war, and abandoned their workplaces to close down significant parts of the country, albeit for short periods of time.

The power of this movement spread to every social sector. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s opposition and his joining with the national antiwar leadership combined the struggle against wars abroad with the struggle for civil and human rights in the U.S. McCarthy-era witch-hunt legislation was largely declared unconstitutional as an enraged public rejected the “national security” myth perpetrated by the government to justify its 10-year genocide.

In summary, the world's greatest economic and military power, replete with ever expanding institutions of domestic repression, from the FBI and the CIA to countless others, could not and did not prevail against an American movement, led in significant part by conscious revolutionary activists of many persuasions and especially those of the Socialist Workers Party. This movement combined with a U.S. military whose ranks had in great part been imbued with the mass antiwar sentiment that was years in the making and the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people to inflict an historic defeat that has not been forgotten to this day.

How can we explain this historic defeat? The answers are many but a few critical points were decisive. First, the Vietnamese, who had previously defeated over a century and longer invasions of foreign powers, including those of Japan, France, and China, refused to forfeit their sovereignty—their right to self-determination. The Vietnamese losses were staggering at the war's end in 1975. Four million were murdered, almost 10 percent of the entire population. The U.S. loses were 58,000.

The war and the McCarthy era

During the infamous McCarthy witch-hunt era of the 1950s, as today, the “national security” interests of the ruling-class minority were “legally balanced” against the right to “individual liberty.” This was codified by the U.S. Supreme Court itself in the infamous 1951 case, *Dennis v. the United States*, where Associate Justice Felix Frankfurter's decision for the court majority, as with Obama's decrees today, held that individual liberties as guaranteed by the Constitution must be “balanced” against—that is, subordinated to—the “national security”

interests of the nation—that is, to the interests of the ruling minority who decide these matters.

With the Dennis decision affirming the arrest of some 10 Communist Party members for their ideas only, the Supreme Court subsequently rejected all challenges to the myriad of anti-communist laws approved by Congress at that time and thereafter. These included the Communist Control Act, the McCarran-Walters Act, the 1940 Smith Act (which was first used to imprison the central leadership of the Socialist Workers Party), the Taft-Hartley (“Slave Labor Act”), and the innumerable mandatory “loyalty oaths” approved by states across the country that became a requirement for employment in the public sector.

This shredding of the Constitution included the routine imprisonment of many of those subpoenaed to appear before various state and federal witch-hunting committees established to investigate “Un-American activities.” Those ordered to appear were asked to “name names,” that is, to provide lists of their “un-American” political associates, especially members of communist organizations, that were deemed as a matter of course and the “law” to be a threat to “national security.”

Many who refused were cited for contempt, often imprisoned and then blacklisted from employment. Lives were ruined with abandon while fear prevailed everywhere. With the near-total compliance of the corporate media’s “free press,” those who spoke out against war and oppression anywhere and who championed the struggle for Black civil rights, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. himself, were ostracized.

The McCarthy era was America’s relatively short-lived experiment with a more repressive form of capitalist rule—though one that was unlike the fascism adopted across Europe in the pre-World War II and wartime years when the European workers’ movements were highly combative and led by Socialist and Communist Parties with deep roots in the mass trade-union and associated working-class political and social organizations. These latter forces had the immediate capability of shutting down significant portions of capitalist production, and with this the potential to usher in a serious socialist challenge to the capitalist powers—not to mention avoiding the imperialist-inspired Second World War, which cost the lives of as many as 80 million people. This potential was thwarted through the treachery of the Stalinist-led Communist parties.

Stalinism and social democracy failed to recognize the horror that a fascist order would bring, and avoided the effort to mobilize working people to stop it—engaging instead in fruitless denunciations of each other. This opened the door wide to fascism in Europe, allowing the crippled “democratic” capitalist state officials, with the full agreement of the corporate elite, to turn political power over to Hitler’s fascist thugs for the purpose of unleashing a mass terror aimed at the destruction of all working-class organizations and their leadership.

This began with Hitler’s formation of extra-legal armed military formations, largely middle class and lumpen (dispossessed workers) in composition. In this important sense, fascism had a mass character, comprised in the main of enraged middle-class layers that large-scale capitalist development had marginalized or driven out of the workforce entirely. Hitler’s storm troopers were increasingly given free rein to break up union meetings and other working-class gatherings until finally the “democratic” state power itself officially appointed him as Germany’s chancellor. The terrified capitalist class viewed the “iron heel” of fascism as qualitatively more preferable to majority working-class rule.

Fascism, always buoyed by a significant mass base of middle-class malcontents and workers permanently cut off from their traditional identification with working-class organizations, is the most extreme and virulent form of capitalist (private property) rule. It includes a near total ban and repression of all political protests and the mass incarceration and/or murder of huge portions of the leadership and activist core of all working class organizations.

Fascism was embraced by the critical components of Spanish, German and Italian capitalism, despite any misgivings about ceding political power to leaders whom they considered to be inferior to their previous "democratic" government "representatives." Given the crisis of their system and its near total loss of legitimacy, it was viewed as the only way to maintain their private property in the means of production. In the case of Germany, fascist rule later included the genocidal murder of six million Jews, Roma ("Gypsies"), and others scapegoated for capitalism's failures.

With the defeat of Nazi Germany, Japan, and their wartime allies—in significant part at the hands of the Soviet Union's Red Army, which heroically and sometimes almost alone challenged the German military behemoth—European capitalism was largely discredited. Ninety percent of Germany's troops were massed on the Russian front. They were driven back across vast swaths of Europe, and with them, the pro-fascist armies and regimes of the East that had collaborated in the Nazis occupation.

In Italy and France, the Communist parties became by far the largest parties of all, given that the previous capitalist wartime governments and leading politicians had collaborated with the Nazis occupation and assented to its politics and mass repression.

The discrediting of capitalism itself in Eastern and Western Europe led to a great wave of revolutionary anti-capitalist fervor that swept over Europe, only to be dampened in the West and thwarted in the East especially by the betrayals of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The latter sought an accommodation with world capitalism ("peaceful co-existence") in the postwar period rather than a revolutionary challenge to its discredited world system.

The wave of rebellion nevertheless swept Europe, and the U.S. as well, with the postwar 1946 U.S. strike wave mobilizing the largest working-class challenge to capitalist prerogatives ever. Millions of workers, whose wages had been frozen during the war while wartime profiteering reached unprecedented heights, closed down the great centers of industrial production.

In response to this and to the European working-class upsurge, fearful U.S. rulers launched the Cold War, seeking to re-arm and rebuild their discredited capitalist allies abroad, to limit the growing influence of socialist ideas, and to limit the threat of rebellion at home with a relatively moderate level of repression, the McCarthy era. This was designed to rid the trade unions of Communist Party influence.

The virulence of the anti-communism of the McCarthy era was also in significant part temporized by the postwar economic boom, in which new markets around the world had been opened to the victorious U.S. imperial victors, and by the relative ease with which CP members were run out of the unions due to their wartime alliance with the American bourgeoisie in maintaining the wartime "no strike pledge."

The Communist Party of the U.S., which had seen a million members pass through its ranks in the 1930s, sought a permanent rapprochement with U.S. capitalism in the postwar period. In the name of "peaceful coexistence" with what CP leader Earl Browder now defined as "progressive" capitalism (i.e., the capitalists who had allied themselves with the USSR during the war), the CPUSA was dissolved. The word "party" was stricken from its name, and it was re-organized as the Communist Political Association. Those who disagreed with Browder were summarily expelled.

Browder had earlier pledged to extend the CP's wartime "no-strike" pledge into the postwar period. This was no insignificant gesture, as at that time CP members led unions in the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) that represented 30 percent of the federation's membership.

With the world in utter chaos and Europe's infrastructure in significant part destroyed, and with the Russian victory

won at the unprecedented cost of the near destruction of the country's infrastructure and some 27 million Russians dead (close to the combined loses of the rest of the world), the U.S. emerged as the preeminent world power. It was not only capable of bailing out and rearming a bankrupt European capitalism but granting significant economic concessions to U.S. workers as well. This both cut short the immediate postwar radicalization and made a prolongation of the McCarthy-era experiment with heightened repression unnecessary.

Meanwhile, the postwar rise of the civil rights movement and the associated massive mobilizations against the Vietnam War took place in the context of an economic boom and prosperity achieved by virtue of a war that killed 80 million and left the U.S. with virtually no international competitors. On the ashes of this world conflagration U.S. capitalism achieved a new lease on life.

By the mid- and late 1960s, much of the McCarthy-era legislation was ruled unconstitutional and soon afterwards, all of it was. The period has been portrayed as an "unfortunate" and perhaps even "accidental" product of a few right-wing fanatics, as opposed to the reality—a conscious decision of the ruling class to prepare for a war with its own working class should it pose a threat to its power.

Palmer raid in the 1920s

A similar phenomenon took place soon after the World War I era when revolutionary socialists in Russia had led the world's first socialist revolution, which tore one-sixth of the land surface of the earth from capitalist domination and ushered in a period of a vibrant socialist democracy that won the hearts and minds of the world's best working-class fighters in every nation.

While the subsequent invasions of the armies of virtually the entire European capitalist world, 17 countries as well as the U.S., attempted but failed to destroy this first workers' state, the terrible imperialist-orchestrated invasions considerably slowed its progress and in time created the conditions for the rise to power and consolidation of the conservative and counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy. In Europe more generally, the response to the initial wartime revolutionary wave was the "white terror," wherein 50,000 revolutionaries and militant workers of all types were murdered or imprisoned.

In the U.S. the government's response was the infamous Palmer raids, described on the website "History Matters" as follows: "The climate of repression established in the name of wartime security during World War I continued after the war as the U.S. government focused on communists, Bolsheviks, and 'reds.' This anticommunist crusade climaxed during the 'Palmer raids' of 1919–1921, when Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's men, striking without warning and without warrants, smashed union offices and the headquarters of Communist and Socialist organizations [and anarchists as well, 'JM]. Palmer believed that communism was 'eating its way into the homes of the American workman.' Palmer charged in this 1920 essay that communism was an imminent threat and explained why Bolsheviks had to be deported."

Thus, the U.S. has a long history of abrogating fundamental rights in the name of "national security" or alleged imminent threats of terrorist acts or even "ideology, nationality, or religious preference." During the 1941 Smith Act anti-communist trials launched against the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party—the party that had led the victorious Minneapolis Teamsters Strikes of 1933-34—the SWP's central leaders were arrested and imprisoned for 18 months for their Marxist ideas only.

During World War II tens of thousands of Japanese-Americans were interned in concentration camps and deprived of all rights and property based on their nationality alone. Today, hundreds of thousands of Muslims in the U.S. are held

suspect, investigated, detained, or otherwise persecuted, with the "war on terror" employed to justify the denial of their basic constitutional rights.

In all of the above instances a fearful ruling class exhibited no compunction in the use of police state measures. The justification was always the same. "National security," that is, the protection of the power and property interests of the elite few, was invoked against any and all who might challenge its heinous crimes in the U.S. or anywhere in the world. This includes mass repression and arrest, imprisonment—and today, the "legalized" murder and torture of those who resist.

World capitalism faces perhaps its greatest crisis in the modern era. Its solution, with few if any exceptions, is to make working people and the most oppressed pay the price of the system's universal economic failures. The tens of trillions of dollars exacted through near-universal austerity measures are used to bail out a system with no recourse other than more of the same—if not famine, endless wars, and the destruction of the environment.

What the capitalist minority fears most is the conscious organization by dedicated, disciplined, and deeply rooted revolutionary fighters of the vast majority, who alone can challenge its rule and replace it with an egalitarian society where the fulfillment of human needs of the earth's people and the construction of a world free from war and environmental destruction trumps the dictatorship of the capitalist profiteers.

This dictatorship reveals its pearly sharp teeth in the threatening code words imbedded in President Obama's still guarded rhetoric, including his promise of "democracy" for all. Behind this stilted language, always inclusive of explicit "national security" justifications for repression, murder, and war, stands a failing system preparing to use any all means necessary to achieve its politically and morally degenerate ends.

Today, U.S. capitalism still rules with the relative consent of the majority, who despite their growing anger and frustrations, retain the illusion that their lives can be improved, in time, by the operation of the system itself rather than through their active intervention as revolutionary subjects.

But the ruling rich nevertheless constantly prepare for the time when these illusions are shattered, and mass working-class forces led by conscious revolutionary socialist fighters and parties that have earned a reputation for being the most consistent representatives of the broad workers' movement in all its manifestations, begin to call into question the system itself.

Today, we see important institutional elements for future repression being methodically moved into place, from major infringements of civil and democratic rights, to preparations for mass arrests, detentions, and imprisonment. A whiff of fascist repression is in the air, awaiting the time when its real expression becomes a requirement for continued capitalist rule. Between now and then, time remains to organize the working-class millions to defend their own interests and thwart this onslaught with a power far beyond the control of any and all would be tyrants.

The anthem of the world workers' movement, "The Internationale," once again sounds its call to action:

"For justice thunders condemnation

A better world's in birth.

No more tradition's chains shall bind us.

Obama's spy methods exposed by Snowden

Arise, ye slaves, no more in thrall! [Thrall is a reference to ancient history's most oppressed layers.]

The earth shall rise on new foundations

We have been naught, we shall be all."

The "we" is nothing less than the vast majority of the earth's working people, who have no interest in their own repression and every interest in organizing to bring into being a new world free from capitalist repression and exploitation in all its forms. The name of this new social order is socialism