

Edward Snowden speaks live in 800 theaters across North America

By Toby Reese
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Following a “sneak preview” of Oliver Stone’s new biographical film, *Snowden*, Stone and NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden participated in a live interview September 14 that was shown in 800 theaters throughout North America.

Stone was at a theater in New York City, along with actors Joseph Gordon-Levitt (who portrays Snowden in the film) and Shailene Woodley (who plays Snowden’s girlfriend, Lindsay Mills). Snowden was in his apartment in Moscow. The event was hosted by critic and author Matt Zoller Seitz. Stone’s film opens September 16.

The live broadcast and the widespread interest in and support for Snowden, especially among young people, in a country whose government has charged him under the Espionage Act, are objectively significant.

Thomas Drake, a former NSA senior executive and whistleblower, who was prosecuted by the US government in 2010 under the Espionage Act, was present in the audience in New York and received a standing ovation for his actions.

During the interview Snowden addressed the argument that those who had “nothing to hide” had nothing to fear from NSA surveillance. This specious argument, an apology for police-state operations, has been utilized by the media and the intelligence community in defense of NSA practices that clearly violate the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution, which prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures and requires any warrant to be judicially sanctioned and supported by probable cause. Snowden traced the origins of the official line of reasoning quite appropriately to Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels.

“Privacy isn’t about something to hide but about something to protect,” Snowden commented. “The

‘you have nothing to fear if you have nothing to hide’ argument is repeated reflexively by government officials and the media, and people need to consider when they are being manipulated to think in a certain way.”

After advising people to set up password managers, encrypted communication and take other precautions to protect themselves from NSA surveillance, Snowden continued, “If you want to stop the NSA from spying on you, the best way to do that right now, perhaps the only way we can do that given the disparity of resources, is through the political process. This is something we’re not hearing enough about in this campaign season. Nobody’s talking about the Constitution, nobody’s talking about their rights, they’re all calling each other names, and I’m not sure that’s what we need right now. We need to be talking more about issues of substance.”

In the question and answer session, Snowden once again came across as a very sincere person, genuinely appalled by what he saw during his time at the NSA (and CIA). However, he is far from understanding either the driving forces or the implications of the mass surveillance. There is a connection between the economic crisis, the vast social inequality in America and globally, and the accumulation of vast amounts of data on the population. The government and military-security apparatus are preparing for mass social opposition and upheaval.

In response to an online question from a 15-year-old who asked what could be done, Snowden responded that, “In thinking about these issues, we need to act locally before globally” and “we have the most influence on the officials closest to us.” Snowden advised the audience to talk about the issues in the film because if the people are silent, it lets the government

get away with what they are doing.

The WSWWS will be posting a review of *Snowden* in the coming days. The film is useful in shedding light on Snowden's own evolution, from an individual who wanted to serve in the US Army Special Forces to someone deeply concerned with the NSA's rampant criminality, its effort, as he puts it, to conduct a "dragnet on the whole world."

Stone's film also makes clear that Snowden's hope that Barack Obama would act differently from his predecessor was dashed, that the spy agencies went on as before.

At one point during the film, Gordon-Levitt/Snowden shares his realization that the surveillance of the population of the entire planet is "not about terrorism, it's about social and economic control, it's only about protecting the supremacy of the US government." The film also has many limitations.

The difficulty is that Snowden and Stone continue to be oriented toward applying pressure on one or another section of the media or ruling elite to rectify the situation and return America to the proper, "Constitutional" path. As the experience of the Obama administration—with its countless drone strikes, its "kill lists," its ongoing war on democratic rights—demonstrates vividly, this is a mistaken and false perspective. Obama's claims that there would be "no more wire tapping" were one lie among many.

Snowden's exposure of NSA illegality and conspiracy was a brave action and he deserves to be defended against all the attacks launched by the media and politicians. On September 15, for example, every member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence signed a letter to Obama urging him not to pardon Snowden, arguing that he had "caused tremendous damage to national security." The campaign against Snowden is a thoroughly bipartisan affair. Meanwhile as the turnout of thousands of people on September 14 in dozens of cities across the US (and Canada) shows, public opinion is increasingly hostile to the warmongers and spymasters in Washington.

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