

Journalist, artists, academics for the defense of Edward Snowden

13 July 2013

The WSWs asked numerous journalists, artists and academics if they would speak out publicly in defense of Edward Snowden, who has performed an immense service by exposing the vast criminal enterprise that is the National Security Agency and the US military-intelligence apparatus.

Snowden, who as of this writing remains trapped at Moscow's international airport, faces an unprecedented campaign of vilification and persecution at the hands of the American authorities, their servants in the media, as well as the governments and intelligence services of all the major powers.

We encourage others to send in statements and join this campaign.

Edward Snowden is an heroic figure: an inspiration in the rapacious, so-called post-modern world. What should be understood is that the Snowden's revelations are not about privacy, not about civil liberties, not even about mass surveillance. They are yet another reminder of the unmentionable: that the United States is a totalitarian state whose 'democratic' facades barely conceal dangers historically identified with fascism.

John Pilger, author, journalist, filmmaker

Occasionally you run into a situation that just isn't that complicated.

To support the hounding of Edward Snowden is to support government by secrecy, to support the attacks on the basic rights and freedoms that every human being deserves.

To attempt to support him by an appeal to Democrats or Republicans is to ask the very forces who are spying on private communications in the US and internationally to defend us against ... themselves!

Sometimes there is a duty to speak out, and this is one of those times. I support Edward Snowden. I salute his courage and integrity. I believe it is either knavery or foolishness to believe that he can be defended except by organized action of the masses of people.

And he deserves to be defended.

Steven Brust, author

Several decades ago, Daniel Ellsberg was able to expose the dark history of the Vietnam War without any form of repercussion. Today, Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden face persecution by a U.S. government that chooses to go after those who reveal injustice rather than the actual perpetrators.

Why are the pilots of a U.S. helicopter that gunned down innocent civilians not being charged with war crimes, nor those breaking the Constitution? Snowden deserves protection on all levels and Manning should be a more worthy candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize than his appalling predecessor.

Tony Williams, author, film historian, professor at Southern Illinois University

The persecution of Edward Snowden is a piece with an overall strategy by

the three branches of government to eviscerate the Constitutional rights of American citizens. Snowden's revelations are particularly important because they demonstrate how directly the government is willing to go to monitor the activities of its citizens. The means that the government has employed to try to capture Snowden demonstrate the lies of the so-called "war on terror". As the mouthpiece of international corporations, the American government is continuing its assault on workers' rights. Edward Snowden's courage is a wake-up call to anyone who still regards the present administration with any benevolence.

The actions of whistleblowers such as Edward Snowden are critical so that the people can view the actual steps that the state has marshaled in its repressive efforts. Coming around the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, these actions are a clear example how the American government has degenerated from its popular mandate. American workers feel betrayed.

The role of the artist is to shine a light on how governmental surveillance is only one manifestation of the erosion of quality of life in the United States. As workers become more militant, the government will call on more and more repressive measures. Every time that the government can claim legitimacy for these programs is a harbinger of more totalitarian practices. Artists and writers must use their voices to ring the bell of freedom. Edward Snowden must be able to proceed unrestrained from harassment of all types.

Kenny Crucial, music critic

What was it Snowden said? Being called a traitor by Dick Cheney is the highest honor an American can achieve?

I think we should put that on the flag.

Nick Baam, author

In my youth, my definition of patriotism was Carl Schurz's: "My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right; and if wrong, to be set right." This was a time when "America: Love it or leave it" was a popular slogan with people who did not understand that if you love something, you stay and set it right. Daniel Ellsberg understood that. When he shared the Pentagon Papers, he became one of my first heroes. That list of heroes now extends through Bradley Manning to Edward Snowden.

The saying, "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance" has long been popular with Americans. Edward Snowden is the latest to step up and join the ranks of the eternally vigilant. Every lover of liberty is grateful to him, and must ask what is loved by those who hound him now.

Will Shetterly, author

Edward Snowden has performed a public service in helping alert us all to the full extent of U.S. government surveillance on both its own citizens and foreigners. His persecution is another of the alarming examples of the U.S. government attempting to criminalize whistleblowing and leaking of information to the media. Snowden, like Bradley Manning, is being demonized by the Obama administration and other politicians and alleged

journalists for doing what Daniel Ellsberg did in making public the Pentagon Papers. That action made Ellsberg a hero to those who believe in historical transparency; we learned a great deal about our government's malfeasance in Southeast Asia from what he revealed. We have gained similar benefits from Manning's revelations about our more recent war crimes, and he may be imprisoned for life for his public service. Julian Assange is a political prisoner as well for his role in working with Manning to report this news.

Even some in the media have been calling for criminal prosecution of journalist Glenn Greenwald for obtaining information from Snowden. Snowden is on the run--as is the honorable tradition of investigative journalism, which some of us still try to practice in this country. The Snowden episode, still unfolding, demonstrates that the Obama administration is hardly different from the Bush regime in its disregard for civil liberties and its determination to pry into the lives and communications of millions of Americans and foreigners. This is outrageous to anyone who still believes in the right to privacy and in the Constitution.

These words attributed to Benjamin Franklin should be in the forefront of our consciousness: "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."

Joseph McBride, journalist and author

Revealing the truth is fundamental to understanding and discussing any issue. History, and history as it is being made, can only be interpreted with full knowledge. Edward Snowden has courageously put forth the part of the truth as he discovered it. Now he cannot claim his constitutional rights to a fair trial or even fair treatment, with the example before him of the delay and persecution of Bradley Manning. For our government to go to the lengths it has gone imprisoning and harassing Private Manning has demonstrated its total abandonment of Constitutional protection for US citizens.

Virginia. G. Smith, author, professor of graphic design

Governments prefer to operate without oversight. It's faster, it's easier. Bypass the citizens--and even their elected representatives--and the government becomes the action hero in a summer movie, accountable to no one, saving the world single-handed.

But in a movie the game is rigged. When a government dodges the oversight built into its own laws, it does so to commit acts the citizens would not endorse. It doesn't save the world; it threatens it.

A government without oversight becomes the villain.

The citizens' hope in times like these isn't John McClain with a rocket launcher. It's the whistle blower, who risks his job, his freedom, and even his life to uncover the unlawful actions of a government gone mad with its own secrecy.

The whistle blower doesn't have a rocket launcher. He doesn't even have great abs. All he has is information, and the support of people who will no longer stand for a government that loves the darkness.

I support Edward Snowden.

Emma Bull, writer

We the People (aka "The United States of America") have been doing some really nasty stuff lately. We're flying robots around the world killing people extra-judicially--that is, unconstrained by any national or international law. We operate a prison camp that is outside of either national or international law that has been detaining demonstrably innocent people for many years with no end in sight. Most recently, we have learned that, as many suspected, we are also running a surveillance police state that sweeps up, indexes, and stores vast amounts of communications data. We--you, me, all of us--are doing these things.

Our government claims that these are in our best interests. They argue

that America has a special, "exceptional" role in the world. Foremost, they argue, they must do these things to "keep us safe". They say, "America is special" and ask that we all wave a little flag and look away while they do things to others that they would never accept be done to us. Are we OK with that?

Once upon a time, We the People were bound together in a shared mission. We had a shared fate and saw that we sank or swam together. That is no longer true. The United States has become a platform for the moneyed interests all around the world to maintain their hegemony. But We the People, who actually live here, have become incidental to their goals.

The United States of America is no longer ruled by We the People. It is ruled by the tiny coterie of people who control essentially all of the wealth and the apparatus of the state. They use the United States to maintain their interests throughout the world. The United States is still a democracy, but in name only: neither of the dominant political parties is actually aligned with the interests of the people who happen to live in the United States.

And any state that does not align itself with maintaining the interests of the extremely wealthy is labeled a "rogue state". Any country that tries to use its wealth for any other purpose finds itself a pariah.

Edward Snowden, by revealing the extent of the police state that we have constructed, has provided a brief moment of illumination when it is possible to see where we are--and where we are going. In return, the United States has made him a stateless person and is bending all its will to catch and punish him.

We the People just violated the sovereignty of Bolivia, in a brazen and illegal attempt to catch Snowden. The United States would never tolerate its Head of State being treated in such a contemptuous manner. Is that exceptionalism? Or just plain imperialism? We the People really need to decide.

I call on Barack Obama--if, as he says, he truly welcomes this debate--to pardon Edward Snowden and invite him back with a guarantee of immunity, to testify publicly before Congress and the American People. Democracy demands it. The failure to engage in this dialog in a meaningful way demonstrates the failure of Democracy in the United States. Terrorism is not the existential threat to our Democracy: it is our own police state.

Steven Brewer, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

Mainstream journalism, as the face of the fourth estate, rather than abiding by the ethical principles to the public to investigate this story from the perspective of the criminal and unconstitutional activities of the NSA and the Military-Media-Political industrial complex, has turned a blind eye to these allegations. It focuses on creating a ridiculous circus behind this "espionage" story, while carefully maligning Snowden's real intention of presenting the appalling truth of what constitutes the inner workings of our social fabric.

A troubling pattern has emerged in the fourth estate's role as the public informant of news and information with which the citizenry can make informed choices: its complicity with corporate structures, and often at the most necessary times, has become intimately entrenched.

It is also distressing to see Mr. Kerry and Mr. Obama make half-hearted defense and light of these events as apologists of these criminal activities. Perhaps it is too much to expect of these men who were naturally selected early on for their ability to "compromise" on so many essential aspects of public service to corporate authority.

In a deeper sense, what constitutes the idea of a participatory democracy has been relegated to pure rhetorical diatribe and nonsense, as our very real rights and freedoms are whittled away on the flimsiest of pretexts. What is the cost to the public of this franchise termed the "War on Terror"? Its economic costs? Its social costs? We have to come to the defense of this young man. We have this obligation.

A. A., film historian

As a writer, I'm as uncomfortable critiquing politics as I am with a politician's critique of literature. Creative people create, politicians politicize, but Snowden has blurred the line for me. His radical, nuanced revelation was an act of art, with the same explicit purpose, "to hold as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

In Snowden's mirror we see ourselves a nation nominally "of the people, by the people and for the people" in which the people can't know what "their" government knows about them. But keeping secrets from us to keep us safe keeps us from being a democracy. We don't allow doctors to lie to us to keep us comfy; we don't want our spouses to.

It's hard not to blink in the light of reflected revelation, and those who don't like what they see have been quick with the hammers, but Snowden has taken up the creative work of artists, and he deserves our defense. Not because they are evil and he is good, but because he is the mirror and they are us. If we want to change, we need to see ourselves in him, then get creative.

Skyler White, science fiction writer

The political and media campaign targeting Edward Snowden horrifies me to no end. I am a scholar and historian with extensive knowledge of totalitarian politics and imperialism. The actions against Mr. Snowden on behalf of President Obama, the NSA, the corporate media, and both right-wing political parties, must be exposed for what they are – ruthless efforts by the U.S. ruling elite to crush political dissent worldwide. Had previous rightist governments in Europe and Latin America possessed the bullying and technological resources of the United States, there would have been no safe havens for political refugees of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, or any other country where genocide and mass murder were part of official government policies.

Had Barak Obama been president 42 years ago, would U.S. intelligence agencies have chased Daniel Ellsberg around the globe and threatened neighboring countries attempting to protect him? In 2013, would the *New York Times* even consider publishing a document as potent as Ellsberg's *Pentagon Papers*? The answers to both questions are grimly obvious.

I support Edward Snowden for bringing to light the unsavory spying policies of the United States government. He, like freedom itself, must be defended and protected at all costs. Anyone remotely familiar with the terrifying legacies of "purges," "extrajudicial executions," and "rendition," must condemn the criminal efforts to capture and arrest this brave and heroic young whistleblower.

Max Alvarez, film historian

A July 4th reminder: Edward Snowden, like Bradley Manning is a whistleblower. Both are heroes, exposing information the public needs to know. Although critics (and in the case of Manning prosecutors) of both men claim some of the information released caused harm beyond exposure and embarrassment of people in power, no one has been able to document any such harm.

Showing the ability of opponents of our civil liberties to maintain two contradictory arguments at the same time, many of those arguing that these two men have done great harm also claim that the information they revealed is of no significance. The truly savvy, some argue, already knew everything that Snowden and Manning revealed. The truth is most whistleblowers reveal information that is widely known, but officially denied. At the time the Pentagon papers were published, it was clear to anyone paying attention that South Vietnam was an artificial State propped by the United States, with no popular support in any region of Vietnam. But that fact was dismissed as crazy ranting in "respectable" public forums such as the NY Times – at least in the United States. The publication of the

Pentagon papers moved that fact out of a limbo where it was known, but not discussed where the public might overhear. The Pentagon papers did reveal very important details that were not already known. But, the key gain it accomplished was to move obvious facts out of the realm where they could be sneered away.

Manning and Snowden have performed a similar service. They have, of course revealed important details that were not previously known. But their key contribution to the public good was to provide evidence of information that has been widely discussed in alternative media, that can be easily deduced from publicly available information and provide evidence that even "respectable" outlets could no longer ignore or try to sneer away. Manning made it impossible to ignore the routine use of murder and torture by the US government outside its borders. Snowden made it impossible to ignore the routine privacy violations both inside and outside US borders by the United States government. Anyone who dismisses this as unimportant does not understand the role of open secrets in repressive regimes. Facts that everybody knows, but that "respectable" discourse denies are a critical to maintaining elites in power. It is a form of soft power that reinforces hard power.

So what Manning and Snowden revealed are important. As I have said many times before, I consider the attempts to smear them Howler Monkey politics. Throw your own excrement at the messengers delivering bad news, and hope enough sticks that the stink cause people to ignore the message. It is not a means of discourse decent people use. However since, the shit-throwing continues, I will take a moment to say that Manning and Snowden have performed a heroic service, and in spite of all the smears are heroes.

It is a disgrace that Bradley Manning is being tried rather than treated as a hero and even more disgraceful that he was subjected to years of torture before trial. It is a further disgrace that he is not even being given a fair trial, that he is being tried in part on hearsay evidence, and upon evidence that he is not allowed to see and refute, and that his lawyers are not allowed to make key arguments in his favor. It is also a disgrace that while the prosecution makes selective leaks to damage his name, he is prevented for the most part from replying and arguing in the same court of public opinion where he is being attacked.

It is no wonder that Snowden chose to flee rather than subject himself to this. I urge, with no hope it will be listened to, that our leaders cease to pursue Snowden. I also urge, with a bit more hope, that Evo Morales and other leaders of nations that claim to be independent of the USA, issue travel documents to Edward Snowden so that he can reach a country where he can apply for political asylum.

Gar Lipow, environmentalist, journalist

Transparency, accountability and democracy are nothing to be feared. Those who won't defend transparency, accountability and democracy only evidence their fears. Solidarity with Edward Snowden!

Benjamin Halligan, Director of Postgraduate Research Studies, College of Arts and Social Sciences, The University of Salford

We live in a nation that talks about transparency and yet obfuscates everything. Our national media is so embedded with the forces it pretends to cover that it's nearly impossible for American citizens to learn any facts about how we are really being governed.

Over my lifetime I have admired courageous journalists like I. F. Stone, who exposed the hypocrisies of the McCarthy era and Vietnam war. Daniel Ellsberg's release of the Pentagon Papers was a seminal event that explained the real Vietnam War and helped to end it. More recently WikiLeaks and the revelations by Edward Snowden continue the tradition of a few brave people exposing the true nature of what is actually going on.

Snowden deserves asylum and he deserves to be seriously listened to.

We live in Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* and must somehow find a way to counterbalance the grim march toward totalitarian society and a world facing environmental collapse. Snowden's revelations can only help us.

John Nichols, author

Edward Snowden's greatest service has been to expose the near universal cowardice and hypocrisy of capitalist "democratic" governments, afraid to lift a finger to defend the most human right of citizens – that of intimacy and privacy, in order of course, not to offend the US Imperialist master. In a socialist world the same technology employed by the NSA et al – the abuse of which Snowden has so courageously brought to light, would provide the planet extraordinary powers of simultaneous self-awareness. All technology is a double-edged sword, including the surveillance variety.

Peter Sylveire, artist

Once upon a time, before he was president, Barack Obama lauded the importance of whistle-blowers to a democratic society, promising that his administration would be the most transparent in history. Though it sounds like parody now, Mr. Obama is entirely correct, and Edward Snowden has done a great service to democracy by exposing the crimes of the world's most transparent administration. Anyone who has even the remotest belief in the concept of democracy should defend him, Bradley Manning, and all the other victims of the increasingly panicked policies of the ruling classes.

Jonas Kyratzes, author and game developer



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