

Terry Hicks defends whistleblower Edward Snowden

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Terry Hicks, the father of former Guantánamo Bay prisoner David Hicks, spoke with the WSWWS this week, adding his voice to those already defending whistleblower Edward Snowden, the former National Security Agency contractor who has exposed the US government's illegal electronic spying operations on millions of American citizens and people around the world.

Hicks campaigned tirelessly for his son David's release from Guantánamo where he was incarcerated for over five years, much of it in solitary confinement, on trumped up terrorism allegations. David Hicks was repatriated to Australia in 2007, after being presented with an offer he could not refuse. He could plead guilty to "providing material support to terrorism", a charge that did not exist prior to 2001, or spend the rest of his life in the military prison hell hole.

The Australian media seem to have gone quiet on Edward Snowden. His life is on the line but the media have dropped any real coverage of the situation he faces. I don't know whether it's a result of a deliberate decision to squash news about him or not but it's not good.

Snowden is in dire straits. Although he's at the Moscow airport, the Russian government have slapped specific guidelines on him and the Americans don't want him getting asylum anywhere. He's tied to one place and cannot move.

When you have to go to ground in someone else's country to protect your own rights then it means that something is very seriously wrong. This is obvious in the way that the American government has responded to Snowden and what he's revealed. If you know that your government is doing illegal things then you have the right and the responsibility to say something about it. Isn't this in the American constitution?

It all comes to down the basics of democracy. The rights of whistleblowers have to be protected and should apply to all those who want to reveal the illegal activities of the US and other governments. The US government campaign against Snowden is also to push any future whistleblowers onto the back foot. This is what they're doing to Bradley Manning and Julian Assange. All these men have taken a courageous stand. This is a big threat to the American government and they don't want it to catch on. They want to silence them and to chop the ground underneath any others who plan to speak out.

Basic rights are being torn down all over the place and if governments don't have laws that suit their purposes then they introduce new ones. People attempt to defend themselves, but then find out that their rights no longer exist. It's very worrying. Snowden, Assange and Manning are not given a fair go—the minds of those running the courts and the government are already made up.

David [my son] was treated in a similar way. He was declared guilty of all sorts of crimes and the media's lies against him were constant. He was never going to face any fair trial in Guantánamo. I saw this first hand at the so-called military commissions.

The "war on terror" we were told about in 2001 is being used by the US for its own aims all over the Middle East and other places. Al Qaeda and other terrorists groups are sometimes described as the "enemy", then a few years later we're told that they're "insurgents." Everyone is supposed to accept this without thinking about it. This is what happened in Libya and now in Syria.

One thing that I learnt in the campaign to release David was that if you stand up and fight there will be lawyers who will come on side, and if you can get

enough individuals who haven't been brainwashed by the media then you can build on it. When people are given the opportunity to think about the real issues involved then they will realise what is really going on. They will start speaking out, pushing all the right buttons, raising their voices and getting involved.

What would have happened if I'd kept my mouth shut and not fought to win support for David's release? It wasn't a popular thing to do in the beginning. But if I'd just sat back and let things happen, he'd still be in Guantánamo.

The US government and media campaign against Snowden is an attack on basic human rights—the right to free speech, to have your own thoughts, and the right not to be spied on. Many years ago someone said to me that we had “thought” police. I didn't realise exactly what they meant, but I've learnt that they were right, and this situation will get worse if we don't defend Snowden, Manning and Assange. If we turn our backs on these people then it will lead to a setback for everyone's rights.



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