

Australian lawyers and investigative journalist defend Edward Snowden

Richard Phillips
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Leading Australian human rights lawyer Stephen Kenny has endorsed the World Socialist Web Site's campaign in defence of American whistleblower Edward Snowden. Kenny, a former chairman of the South Australian Council for Civil Liberties, began representing David Hicks in early 2002, after learning about his illegal incarceration in the Guantánamo US military prison.

Kenny was the first civilian lawyer allowed to visit a Guantánamo prisoner and was involved in US legal proceedings for a writ of habeas corpus against President George W. Bush and the US military for illegally jailing Hicks. He is currently preparing an American court appeal to overturn the "providing material support to terrorism" frame-up charges imposed on Hicks in 2007.

We should all be concerned about the fate of Edward Snowden who remains trapped in a bureaucratic and legal nightmare. We should all realise that what has happened to Mr Snowden is a serious threat to all of us.

What is happening to him is a warning to everyone who discovers that their government is doing something illegal. Should this occur in the future, I have no doubt that many will choose to ignore the illegality for fear they may end up in Mr Snowden's position. This is not something that is conducive to our rights as citizens.

In the future it will take a very brave whistle blower to reveal such secrets and consequently we need to all stand up for Mr Snowden and let governments around the world know that if they are doing something illegal or simply wrong, people will expose them.

Snowden is to be congratulated and applauded for the stand he has taken but he now needs protection from those whose illegal activities he has exposed.

South Australian lawyer Brian Deegan sent the

following statement. Deegan's eldest son, 22-year-old Joshua, was tragically killed in the Bali terrorist bombings in October 2002. Following his son's death, Deegan began questioning the Australian government's foreign policy—its military intervention into East Timor and involvement in the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

In December 2002, Deegan publicly denounced the Howard government's suppression of intelligence warnings—made just days before the bombing—of a possible attack on tourists in Bali. He addressed antiwar protests prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, condemning Canberra's use of the Bali bombings to justify its participation in the bogus "war on terror."

The present fiasco surrounding Edward Snowden, the former National Security Agency contractor who has exposed the US government's illegal electronic spying operations immediately reminded me of the thoughts of three prominent philosophers.

The Irish born Edmund Burke (1729–1797) who served in the British House of Commons, made the observation: "Time and again those who profess to be good seem to clearly outnumber those who are evil, yet those who are evil seem to prevail far too often. Seldom is it the numbers that determine the outcome, but whether those who claim to be good men are willing to stand up and fight for what they know to be right."

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato remarked: "Mankind will never see an end of trouble until ... lovers of wisdom come to hold political power, or the holders of power ... become lovers of wisdom."

Finally, the 16th century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau observed: "The English think they are free. They are free only during the election of members of parliament."

In the last two thousand years has anything changed?

The answer is surely no. The citizens of most western countries believe they live in an ideal world. But that can only be by comparison to certain states. We elect people we hardly know on the basis of policies we infrequently understand and promises they seldom keep. But we blindly put our faith and our well-being in their hands.

However, once elected they (the politicians) believe they have been empowered, have the imprimatur, to do all things (they believe) necessary—whatever it takes.

In recent years, the leaders in the US, in Britain and in Australia respectively thought it prudent to invade a sovereign state (Iraq). That action was taken despite its illegality, despite the informed wisdom and in conflict with the majority of citizens. Hundreds of thousands of innocents died (collateral damage). It was wrong and our children may pay the ultimate price. One of mine already has. I couldn't stop it. We couldn't stop it. Maybe men like Snowden will be able to do so in the future.

Andrew Fowler, a former investigate reporter for ABC television's "Four Corners" and "Foreign Correspondent," has also endorsed the WSWS defence campaign. Fowler is author of The Most Dangerous Man in the World, the inside story of WikiLeaks and co-author of the "Four Corners" program "Sex, Lies and Julian Assange." He sent the following comment.

It seems to be a continuing source of frustration by the United States that those who it has entrusted with its secrets at times decide to speak out and tell the world what they know. The problem for the US is not so much that the material is secret for any national security reason but that it is secret because if it were made public the rest of the world would be shocked, or in the case of what Edward Snowden revealed to us, horrified.

Snowden decided to speak out, he said, because he did not want to help build a world where nothing we did or said could ever be truly private. It was a supremely brave act, all the more so because of the precedent of Bradley Manning who was treated so appallingly after his arrest. It's a supreme irony that the US is prepared to challenge the Constitutional rights guaranteeing its citizens freedom of speech while all the time it spies on them, and prosecutes them if their dare speak out. All for their own good, of course.



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