

Lon Snowden defends son's actions in TV interview

Thomas Gaist
12 August 2013

In an interview Sunday on ABC News' "This Week" program, Lon Snowden, the father of National Security Agency (NSA) whistle-blower Edward Snowden, and his lawyer, Bruce Fein, strongly defended the younger Snowden's actions and criticized President Obama and the congressional leadership.

Snowden and Fein said they were not open to a plea deal. "The only deal will be true justice," Snowden said.

Snowden said he wanted the issue to be "vetted in open court," adding that "what I've seen is much political theater." Referring to Obama's Friday press conference, at which the president defended the illegal spying programs exposed by Edward Snowden and accused the whistle-blower of breaking the law and jeopardizing national security, Lon Snowden said, "I was disappointed in the president's press conference."

At the press conference, Obama said, "If, in fact, he [Edward Snowden] believes that what he did was right, then, like every American citizen, he can come here, appear before the court, with a lawyer, and make his case."

What cynicism! Obama personally ordered the extra-judicial drone assassination in Yemen of Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen, on September 30, 2011. In the same attack, another US citizen, Samir Kahn, was also killed. Two weeks later, al-Awlaki's 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, an American citizen born in Denver, was killed in another US drone strike in Yemen.

Lon Snowden said that Obama's hollow talk of reforming the NSA surveillance apparatus was "driven by his clear understanding that the American people are absolutely unhappy with what they've learned, and that more is going to be forthcoming."

Fein rejected Obama's assertion at the press conference that Snowden is not a patriot, pointing out, "It was the voice of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine, who defined a patriot as someone who saves his country from

his government."

When the host of "This Week," George Stephanopoulos, raised the president's claim that legal avenues were available to Snowden to express his opposition to the surveillance programs and suggested that he should have gone to the congressional oversight committees instead of the *Guardian* newspaper, Fein remarked, "The congressional oversight committees have gone on record, [Senate Intelligence Committee Chairwoman] Dianne Feinstein, saying he's guilty of treason. These were the committees that knew for seven years what was going on and refused to disclose it to the American people..."

"And Edward Snowden is supposed to go to them? That seems rather implausible, because they were the ones who were responsible for the secrecy."

Along similar lines, Lon Snowden commented, "Let's say he got on an airline in Honolulu and he chose to fly to Washington, DC, lands at Dulles, and he actually gets an audience with, oh, let's say, [New York Republican Congressman] Peter King or Dianne Feinstein. How do we think that he would have been received if he had a private audience with them? We have seen how they reacted, even when the truth comes out, they spin the truth, they try to hide it from the American people. He would have been buried under the Capitol. And we would have never known the truth."

Responding to statements by US officials that Edward Snowden should have remained in the United States to "face justice," Lon Snowden said that "when you consider many of the statements made by our leaders, leaders in Congress, they are absolutely irresponsible and inconsistent with our system of justice. They have poisoned the well, so to speak, in terms of a potential jury pool."

Asked about the "traitor versus patriot" debate, Snowden said he considered his son a truth-teller. "What I

would say is that my son has spoken the truth,” he said. “He has sacrificed more than either the president of the United States or Peter King has ever in their political careers or their American lives.”

Lon Snowden also suggested that reporters should have pressed the president during the press conference about “the DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] Special Operations Division” and “his treatment of whistle-blowers.” Obama’s assertion that whistle-blower legislation would have protected Edward Snowden was “absolutely untrue,” said Lon Snowden. “Either the president is being misled by his advisers, or he is intentionally misleading the American people.”

Stephanopoulos then asked directly, “You don’t think he would have been protected by the whistle-blower status?” to which Snowden replied, “Absolutely not.”

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange spoke out Sunday in response to Obama’s claim at the press conference that he had “called for a thorough review of our surveillance operations before Mr. Snowden made these leaks.” Assange ridiculed Obama’s premise that the government would be talking about surveillance reform if Snowden has not released the documents, saying that “rather than thank Edward Snowden, the president laughably attempted to criticize him while claiming that there was a plan all along, ‘before Edward Snowden.’”

In a segment immediately following the interview with Lon Snowden and Bruce Fein, Senator Robert Menendez (Democrat of New Jersey) spouted the line of virtually the entire US political establishment, saying: “In my view, Ed Snowden is a fugitive and deserves to be in an American courtroom, not in asylum in Russia.”

Menendez played the terrorism card, saying that “it’s easy since we have not, thank God, had an attack on American soil since September 11th, to deminimize [sic] the threat, but the threat is real.” Such abstract invocations of a terrorist threat and references to 9/11 are now routinely used by politicians of both parties in an attempt to create a climate of fear and justify wholesale violations of the US Constitution.

Despite the months-long smear campaign against Edward Snowden and propaganda offensive in defense of the NSA surveillance programs, opinion polls show strong support for Snowden and widespread skepticism toward the government claim that democratic rights must be sacrificed for the sake of “security.” A chasm is opening up between ordinary people the world over, for whom Snowden is a hero, and the ruling elites, who view him as a traitor and a threat to their privileges.

At the same time, Lon Snowden’s extended appearance on national television Sunday and the generally respectful treatment he received from host Stephanopoulos may indicate disquiet and tactical disagreements within the ruling elite and the state over the manner in which the Snowden affair has been handled to this point.

In contrast to previous appearances by defenders of Edward Snowden, such as journalist Glenn Greenwald, the mainstream media host was notably restrained on Sunday. There may be growing concerns that the heavy-handed attack on Snowden has only increased popular support for him and further discredited the Obama administration and the political system as a whole.

No doubt there are also elements within the intelligence and military apparatus, eager to bring Snowden back to the US so as to extract information from him, who are open to pursuing more subtle and devious methods for achieving that aim. They have questions they want to ask the whistle-blower. What else does he have in his files? What has he given the Russians?

Whatever the tactical nuances, however, all sections of the ruling class are agreed that Snowden’s remaining at large is intolerable. He must be captured by whatever means necessary and interrogated with extreme prejudice.

Lon Snowden and Bruce Fein will be traveling to Russia in the coming week, with the tacit approval of the US government. They have stated that they will encourage Edward Snowden to consider returning to the US for a “fair trial.”

Snowden and Fein must understand: official guarantees of Snowden’s safety and a fair trial are worthless. No assurances given by the government on this matter can be given any credence.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact