

Australian film directors defend Edward Snowden

Richard Phillips
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Three independent filmmakers from Australia have backed the World Socialist Web Site defence campaign for Edward Snowden, opposing Washington's witch-hunt of the former NSA contractor and voicing their concerns over the escalating attack on democratic rights.

Curtis Levy has been making documentary films for over three decades. These include Sons of Namatjira; Riding the Tiger, a three-part series on the Indonesian dictator Suharto; Breakout; and The Queen Goes West. His best-known films are the award-winning Hephzibah (1998), a sensitive exploration of the complex life of Hephzibah Menuhin, sister of acclaimed violinist Yehudi Menuhin; and The President versus David Hicks (2004), about the US military's illegal incarceration of David Hicks in Guantanamo. Levy sent the following statement.

It's my belief that people of conscience like Edward Snowden should not be hunted down and treated as enemies of the state. People like Snowden and Manning, who are prepared to speak out about the illegal activities of their government, should be valued for their considerable bravery in the cause of a more open society, not persecuted.

It is sad that a leader like President Obama, who initially seemed to enter the political arena as a man of peace, has behaved no differently from his predecessors, broadening surveillance programs as well as embarking on serial extrajudicial killings around the world with his drones program. By so doing, Obama has not only succeeded in alienating large sections of the world's population, but also he's increased the sense of paranoia and fear in his own country. Edward Snowden is to be admired for his realisation that transparency is crucial if Americans and others are to resume normal and open lives. One can only hope that it's not too late for American leaders to have the maturity to listen and learn from whistleblowers such as Edward Snowden.

The world will become a wonderful place when courageous people like Snowden, Manning, and Assange are recognised as heroes fighting for open and transparent society, a society of friends rather than enemies.

Whistleblowers like Snowden provide a constant reminder

of what true democracy is meant to be.

Alex Kelly is a filmmaker and freelance artist based in Alice Springs in Central Australia. She has made numerous films for the Australian arts company Big hART, including numerous short documentaries about indigenous Australians.

Sometimes the politics around surveillance, whistleblowing and war are so dark that I want to look away. Edward Snowden did not look away, he stood up and broke silence and this courageous act inspires me to not look away.

To keep a fixed gaze on what is happening, to seek information, to work for justice and support those who take great risks to expose the truth at play behind the spin of war. With gratitude and in solidarity with Edward Snowden.

David Bradbury, who began his career as an ABC radio journalist in the early 1970s has made over 21 feature-length documentaries during his extensive career. Some of his best known works are Front Line; Public Enemy Number One, about journalist Wilfred Burchett, the first western journalist allowed into Hiroshima after the US atomic bombing of the city; Chile Hasta Cuando, on the Pinochet dictatorship; A Hard Rain, about the global nuclear industry; and, most recently, On Borrowed Time, a portrait of the life and work of film director Paul Cox.

Bradbury has won many international film festival prizes, received five Australian Film Industry awards and two Academy Award nominations. He sent the following statement supporting Snowden and opposing Australian government involvement in increasing US military aggression and the associated attacks on basic democratic rights.

Ever since primary school days I've despised bullies. It comes with the territory of bearing the name 'David' and hearing repeatedly as a child the biblical story of David and Goliath. Then trying to live up to that name subconsciously imprinted into my DNA and the courage of the Old Testament Daniel and the lion's den.

Bradley Manning, Edward Snowden and Julian Assange are three such men who have dared to put their heads into

the mouth of the Lion. With a few well-chosen pebbles they've found the Achilles heel of the US military corporate machine that for the last 60 years has ruled our lives, imprinted its own myths about 'freedom and democracy' onto our minds via Hollywood.

Growing up in Australia of the 1960s, I studied German history and was repeatedly struck by the unanswered question: why did the Germans not challenge their Nazi government for what they did to the gypsies and Jews? There was an implied piety on our part as 'more civilised' and socially conscience-able Anglo-Saxons that ordinary Germans of those times were spineless, lacked any real humanity in turning a blind eye to the pogroms and the knock on the door in the middle of the night as their Jewish neighbours were lead away. They said and did nothing. We wouldn't do that! Yet many of us are allowing our 'democratic' governments to get away with mass murder by turning a blind eye to what is happening around us in the Middle East, Africa and Asia in the name of the 'war on terror'.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd claims Dietrich Bonhoeffer as his hero for laying down his life in standing up to the Nazis but Mr Rudd ignores his own fellow Australian, Julian Assange, who dared to expose the murderous US regime and Pentagon war machine.

Drone attacks under the Obama administration have radically increased from what Bush began. Every week Obama and his aides draw up who should die next from a list of a thousand or more names of pet hates in 30 countries. Drones under presidential order from Obama have claimed many thousands of lives in what has become a virtual reality war by the US military.

The US spy facility Pine Gap in Australia helps plot the course of these pilotless drones. We in Australia are complicit in the murder of pregnant women in Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, Yemen and so forth. Little kids and ordinary civilians who make up the weekly tally conveniently termed 'collateral damage' in the White House press briefings.

Murder, water board torture, holding civilians without charge for years without legal representation or trial, urinating on slain enemy, sexual humiliation and bragging about it on the internet has become a necessary price to pay so we first world citizens can live with 'freedom' and 'democracy.'

Men of morality like Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden dared to risk all and now receive scores of years in gaol for exposing the lie that we live in a democracy. And the conservative and liberal Establishment media—almost baying for their blood—hide behind a supercilious 'objectivity' that these men have charges of espionage and

betraying their country to answer, rather than their political masters who should be brought before the court of world public opinion and tried for mass murder.

It takes courage to stand up to Power. The exemplary bravery of Bradley, Julian and Edward, now in Australia Graeme Dunstan, are helping to expose the cold-blooded nature of the US war machine.

Every two years, Australia hosts Talisman Saber—claimed by the US military to be the world's 2nd largest military exercise. This year, it involved 28,000 (18,000 US and 9,000 Aussie) troops engaged in land, sea and air warfare training primarily at Shoalwater Bay—part of the Great Barrier Reef. Every two years, peace activists undertake a variety of creative actions to oppose, resist and disrupt these war rehearsals. In 2011, Bryan Law, now deceased, entered the Rockhampton (civilian) airport and rode across the tarmac on a large red tricycle—to a Tiger Attack Helicopter—which he then struck with a garden implement—in the tradition of "beating swords in to Ploughshares." Bryan's support person was Graeme Dunstan, aged 71, who has been charged and could face 10–12 years in prison. His trial begins August 19, in Rockhampton. As with Julian, Bradley and Edward, we must also do everything we can to support Graeme.

These four men have shown the Emperor indeed has no clothes when he talks of freedom and democracy and the values of the American way of life. That's why the Emperor wants to silence these men, put them behind bars as a stark warning to others that it doesn't pay to point out the hypocrisy of a bankrupt political system and ideology that has come to the end of its time. We can't stand idly by. Otherwise we are complicit in that murder and mayhem that is done in our name, by our country.



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