

“Truth will out”—Filmmaker Deepa Mehta defends Edward Snowden

Richard Phillips
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Internationally acclaimed filmmaker Deepa Mehta has sent the following statement in defence of Edward Snowden, the former National Security Agency contractor who has exposed the US government's illegal spying operations on millions of American citizens and people around the world.

Praising the courageous stand taken by Snowden, Mehta denounces the 35-year conviction of Chelsea Manning on spying charges; opposes Washington's escalating attacks on democratic rights; and points to the growing social crisis in the US.

Mehta, an Indian-born, Canadian-based filmmaker has directed nine features, including her Indian trilogy—*Fire* (1996), *Earth* (1998) and *Water* (2005)—and *Midnight's Children* (2012). In 2000, she was targeted by right-wing Hindu fundamentalists, who, aided and abetted by Indian state authorities, shut down production of her movie *Water*. Mehta was subjected to slanders and death threats for allegedly insulting India and attacking Hinduism. The film, which dramatised the oppression of widows in contemporary India, was eventually shot in Sri Lanka.

Mehta is currently working on *Exclusion*, her latest film, about a group of Indians who attempted to immigrate to Canada on a Japanese coal ship in 1914 but were barred by Canada's racist immigration policies.

Truth will out

In 2013 Pfc. Chelsea Manning was convicted of violations of the Espionage Act. One would imagine she had, as she was accused of, provided the enemy with vital secrets thereby endangering troops.

Rather, she leaked information revealing multiple incidents of US troops firing on and killing civilians, the number of civilian casualties, abuse of prisoners, and failure to investigate hundreds of reports of rape,

torture, and murder. For making this public knowledge, she was sentenced to 35 years in prison.

This is five years longer than in a 1989 case in which an army specialist was actually supplying secrets to the Soviets.

Now Edward Snowden is under the hammer.

As of writing this article, Snowden has temporary sanctuary in Russia. The US attorney general, trying to get him back onto American soil, assured Russia that they would not seek the death penalty for Snowden. A valid concern as the USA is the only G8 nation that still has capital punishment. Despite this reassurance, the fact stands that America could conceivably put someone to death for speaking the truth.

The problem the government seems to be having with Snowden is that he was a spy—one who worked through computers, but a spy nevertheless—and spies (to borrow a phrase) all spy on people for money. It's just this time the ones being watched on were the intelligence organizations themselves. It is not a flattering picture that is emerging.

Snowden has revealed that the intelligence agencies consider encryption “suspicious activity” and they have a blanket authorization to collect and decrypt anything that is encrypted by anyone, in the United States, or abroad. Encryption is *standard* for financial records, personal information etc. etc.

He revealed that the NSA routinely shares intelligence with Israel without scrubbing it of information about US citizens.

This indiscriminate collection and dissemination of information is not only morally bankrupt, but puts into jeopardy treaties and alliances that America has with other nations. The Five Eyes (this is a real organization, not something stolen from 1984) consists of the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and they

share information. Ostensibly to prevent terrorism. That makes America's data collection a problem that influences not only America, but also eight other nations (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales as well as the other previously listed countries). At this point there is little information about whose data is going to which countries. What is it being collected for?

It seems to me that indiscriminate collection and distribution of sensitive data is something that citizens should know about. It also seems to me that this wide-net approach to the collecting of data should be illegal. The government says it is not, but any rulings were made in secret meetings by secret committees so there is no system of checks and balances in place. For a democracy—and a democracy that seems determined to tell everyone else how to run their countries—it is not behaving in accordance with its own beliefs.

Spying on your own people is something that is most often associated with an Orwellian society, with Stalinist oppression, with corrupt dictators. And yet Snowden is facing life in prison (but not execution!) for letting citizens know what their government is doing.

America has a lot of problems:

- In 2012 more active-duty soldiers committed suicide than died in combat.
- Approximately 15 percent of women in the US will be raped.
- 15 percent of female veterans have military sexual trauma and women in the military are more likely to be assaulted by a fellow soldier than killed in combat.
- 50 percent of Americans will spend at least one year below the poverty line.
- More than 630,000 Americans are currently homeless. This number is predicted to rise and does not include the under-housed.
- The U.S. national debt is approximately \$16,941,063,000,000 (nearly seventeen trillion dollars).
- If the trend continues, there will be approximately 14 more mass shootings before Obama leaves office.

The list goes on.

Rather than trying to jail persons who speak the truth, perhaps the American government should spend a little more time looking after its citizens instead of listening in on their phone conversations.

Edward Snowden is just the most recent in a growing list of people who have spoken up and are now being

punished for doing the right thing. It is not just. And those who deal in the truth should have nothing to fear from it. We all need to speak up and let our governments know that what they are doing is not alright, and we will no longer stand for it.



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