

The Snowden Pulitzer

Patrick Martin
18 April 2014

The Pulitzer Prize Gold Medal for Public Service was awarded Monday to two newspapers that published the bulk of the reports on illegal and unconstitutional spying by the US National Security Agency, based on documents leaked by former NSA contractor and whistleblower Edward Snowden.

While the award went to the *Guardian US* and the *Washington Post*, and the four journalists who produced the articles—Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras, Ewan MacAskill and Barton Gellman—there is no question that the main honoree was Snowden himself. Now in exile in Russia, the 30-year-old is sought on espionage charges by the US government that could bring life imprisonment or even the death penalty.

Since the Pulitzer Prize was voted by a committee of 19 journalists and editors, sponsored by Columbia University, the Obama administration and the US intelligence apparatus have maintained a near-total silence, after nearly a year of denunciations of Snowden and declarations that the documents he leaked had done incalculable damage to US national security.

The American media likewise has, for the most part, maintained a discreet silence. There has been little discussion of the significance of the Pulitzer Prize for the Snowden revelations. No reporters raised the subject at press briefings by White House Press Secretary Jay Carney or at Obama's Thursday afternoon press conference.

One notable exception is a column published in Tuesday's *Wall Street Journal* by Liam Fox, a Conservative Party member of the British parliament and former secretary of state for defense. This vicious and hysterical piece accurately reflects the outlook that dominates the ruling circles and political establishments in both the US and Britain. (The British government went so far as to force the *Guardian* to destroy hard drives with documents provided by Snowden, and subsequently detained, on the basis of

anti-terrorist laws, Greenwald's partner David Miranda.)

In the *Wall Street Journal* article ("Snowden and His Accomplices"), Fox writes: "Edward Snowden thinks of himself as a cyber-age guerrilla warrior, but in reality he is a self-publicizing narcissist." Fox concludes by stating, "For once, let's say what we mean. Let us call treason by its name."

Snowden is threatened with prosecution and possible assassination, with US intelligence agents widely quoted threatening to murder him, and congressional Democrats and Republicans alike baying for his blood. There was no reference to these death threats in the media coverage of the Pulitzer awards, nor has the question ever been raised publicly with the White House.

This silence only underscores that there is no letup either in the rampant US government spying on the entire world—including the whole of the American population—or in the official persecution of those who expose these illegal and unconstitutional operations.

Snowden revealed that the National Security Agency systematically intercepts and captures the Internet and telecommunications traffic of the entire world, sifting through it with a myriad of sophisticated programs to analyze calling patterns and track networks of association. The NSA can review the content of whatever e-mail, text message, social media posting, Internet search or phone call it chooses. And it systematically creates and exploits vulnerabilities on the Internet to give it access to computer systems all over the world.

These methods have allowed the US intelligence apparatus to create vast databases on the political views and activities of literally billions of people, not for the purpose of ferreting out a handful of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists, but to create the infrastructure for dictatorial rule. The NSA can supply the dossiers

and arrest lists for a police state crackdown on political opposition to the capitalist system in any country in the world, and especially the United States itself.

It is because they sense the grossly anti-democratic and dictatorial character of this mass surveillance that the vast majority of the world's population, including the American people, are hostile to it and supportive of Snowden. Opinion polls have shown a clear majority in the United States—despite the ceaseless propaganda campaign by the government and media—endorsing Snowden's actions in exposing the NSA.

The Pulitzer Prize amounts to an acknowledgement of this popular sentiment and is an embarrassment to the Obama administration and the intelligence apparatus.

Most Pulitzer gold medals have been given to newspapers for uncovering corruption in local government or police forces, or for exposing especially flagrant abuses of workers or the environment in industries like coal mining, agribusiness and nursing homes. But on a few occasions, the gold medal has had broader political significance, as when it was awarded in 1972 to the *New York Times* for publication of the Pentagon Papers, and in 1973 to the *Washington Post* for its investigation of Watergate.

Edward Snowden issued a statement in response to the award, declaring, "This decision reminds us that what no individual conscience can change, a free press can. My efforts would have been meaningless without the dedication, passion, and skill of these newspapers, and they have my gratitude and respect for their extraordinary service to our society. Their work has given us a better future and a more accountable democracy."

There is no doubt of the sincerity of Snowden's views, for which he has already sacrificed enormously. But his exposures only provide an important impetus for the struggle to defend democratic rights. The central question is to identify the fundamental source of the development of police state methods of rule: the yawning social divide between the financial aristocracy and the vast majority of working people. In the final analysis, democracy is incompatible with a society of such vast and ever growing social inequality.

Social inequality is a product of capitalism, as is the build-up of the repressive powers of the state to defend the corporate-financial oligarchy against the threat of

mass social resistance by the working class. The defense of democratic rights requires the independent political mobilization of the working class to put an end to the profit system and establish genuine democracy and equality, in other words, to create a socialist society.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact