

Edward Snowden seeks asylum renewal from Russia

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14 July 2014

Edward Snowden's lawyer filed papers this week seeking permission for the former US National Security Agency (NSA) contractor to remain in Russia beyond the one-year stay granted in 2013 by the Putin government. Having revealed before the entire world illegal surveillance programs run by the NSA and numerous other governments worldwide, Snowden remains a political refugee, forced to plead for the basic human right of asylum.

The whistleblower faces possible torture, incarceration without legal process, and even death should he fall into the hands of the American state. Such punishments are regularly inflicted upon individuals who pose far less of a threat to the "national interests" of the US government and ruling elite.

"We have submitted documents for extending his stay in Russia," Snowden's lawyer Anatoly G. Kucherena told *Interfax* this week.

Preliminary indications suggest that the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS) will allow Snowden to remain in the country.

"I do not see any problem in extending the temporary political asylum," Vladimir Volokh, a top Russian migration official, said this week.

"Circumstances have not changed. Snowden's life is still in danger; therefore the Federal Migration Service has every basis to prolong his status," Volokh said.

That Snowden's life is truly in danger was made clear by his experiences immediately after he began leaking NSA documents. Prior to being granted asylum, Snowden was forced to live in the transit zone of Moscow's airport for weeks, filing asylum applications with 15 governments to no avail.

Despite the straightforward principle set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum

from persecution," Snowden struggled to find a single government which would guarantee him this human right, while facing a possible death sentence on espionage charges for the "crime" of publicizing unconstitutional and illegal mass spying by the US government.

At the time, Putin made Snowden's stay in Russia conditional on his agreement to "cease his work aimed at inflicting damage to our American partners." Taking a principled stand, Snowden withdrew his initial request for asylum in response to this condition.

After it became clear that Snowden had exposed extensive US surveillance directed against US rivals and nominal allies, government after government worldwide refused asylum. While intense US pressure was being brought to bear, this was fundamentally an expression of the fact that capitalist governments defend the interests of wealthy ruling strata whose privileges are threatened by the political implications of Snowden's exposures.

During this period, as the Obama administration worked hard to block governments from accepting Snowden's applications for refugee status, Snowden responded in a statement on July 1, 2013. He wrote, "In the end, the Obama administration is not afraid of whistleblowers like me, Bradley Manning or Thomas Drake. We are stateless, imprisoned, or powerless. No, the Obama administration is afraid of you. It is afraid of an informed, angry public demanding the constitutional government it was promised—and it should be."

In a stunt that threatened numerous lives and violated international law, the Obama administration connived to force down Bolivia's presidential jet as it travelled across Europe after a visit to Russia. US intelligence had suspected, incorrectly, that Snowden had boarded the plane in an effort to travel to Latin America. The

governments of France, Portugal, Italy and Spain all abetted the piratical and terroristic US plot, refusing to allow the Bolivian jet to cross their air space.

Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa backpedaled from a possible asylum offer after receiving a short phone call from US Vice President Joseph Biden. Correa then threatened that there would be “consequences” against personnel in his own government who gave Snowden a safe-conduct pass to leave Hong Kong.

Snowden reiterated his principled positions in a letter to Correa, writing, “I remain free and able to publish information that serves the public interest. No matter how many more days my life contains, I remain dedicated to the fight for justice in this unequal world.”

The Brazilian Workers Party government led by Dilma Rousseff announced publicly that it would not even consider Snowden’s application, even when confronted with a petition signed by 1.1 million Brazilians supporting Snowden’s application. Such was the gratitude shown by the Brazil government for Snowden’s work, which exposed that the US was spying on Rousseff’s own personal communications, as well as on Brazil’s state-owned oil company, Petrobras.

Snowden wrote at the time, in an “Open letter to the people of Brazil,” “Today, if you carry a cell phone in Sao Paulo, the NSA can and does keep track of your location: they do this 5 billion times a day to people around the world.”

He added, “When someone in Florianopolis visits a website, the NSA keeps a record of when it happened and what you did there. If a mother in Porto Alegre calls her son to wish him luck on his university exam, NSA can keep that call log for five years or more. They even keep track of who is having an affair or looking at pornography, in case they need to damage their target’s reputation.”

Germany also refused asylum, after Snowden’s leaks exposed US operations directed against the German government and German corporations. While the German Green Party made a show of support for Snowden’s asylum request, this was done strictly to bolster its appearance as an “opposition” party. When in power during the years 1998-2005, the German Greens supported passage of laws that massively expanded the power of the German intelligence and

surveillance apparatus.

With nowhere else to turn, Snowden worked out a deal that would allow him a one-year residence in Russia. This is set to expire July 31.

The Russian government defends the interests of a capitalist elite engaged in criminal and repressive policies. Its defense of Snowden has not been motivated by devotion to democratic principles and human rights. Instead, growing geopolitical tensions between the US and Russia account for the willingness of the Putin regime to provide short-term safe harbor to the whistleblower, who has done so much to humiliate the US government and expose its crimes.

The long-term safety of Snowden can be guaranteed only through a conscious struggle by the international working class to come to the aid of one of the foremost defenders of democratic rights.



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