

German TV documentary on the hunt for Edward Snowden

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The revelations of Edward Snowden have exposed to the world a massive breach of democratic rights by the US intelligence agencies and their allies. They have also unleashed protests and expressions of sympathy for Snowden's efforts among broad social layers.

Last week, the German state broadcaster ARD screened a documentary by John Goetz and Poul Heilbuth titled *Hunting Snowden (Jagd auf Snowden)*. The programme details Snowden's persecution by the US authorities and his search for a country that would grant him asylum.

The documentary begins with a dramatic statement by US Senator Dianne Feinstein (Democrat, California). The Senate Intelligence Committee chairman declares: "I want him to be captured. The hunt is on!" The programme assumes the guise of a spy thriller. The measures taken by the US authorities to remove Snowden from circulation are extraordinary and menacing. This is not only the view of the documentary, but of the protagonists themselves: Edward Snowden, as well as Julian Assange and Sarah Harrison of WikiLeaks.

Snowden meets several times in Hong Kong with journalists Glenn Greenwald and Ewen McAskill, passing them documents for publication in the *Guardian* regarding the NSA's mass surveillance programmes. Even then, the *Guardian* journalists are convinced that Snowden would be captured very soon. He was already being sought, since he had not reported back to his employer.

A week later, Snowden admits to authorship of the revelations in a video. He also asks WikiLeaks for help and Sarah Harrison then accompanies him for four months into his exile. At first, Snowden does not want to depart from Hong Kong for fear of being caught at the airport, but he is finally persuaded. False trails are

set down by the purchase of a dozen different tickets. Snowden evades detection at the airport, despite an arrest warrant issued for him and US threats against Hong Kong, after an incorrect middle name is included in the warrant.

So Snowden and Harrison land in Moscow, but a connecting flight to South America is not possible, as the US has since cancelled his passport. Snowden and Harrison are forced to wait at the airport for a month until a more favourable situation emerges. In the meantime, Snowden makes several asylum applications, which are either quickly refused or silently ignored, in particular by West European governments.

The hunt for Snowden by the US authorities had been largely focused on locating him and putting pressure on Hong Kong. It now becomes increasingly hectic and dramatic. *Hunting Snowden* provides some details that make clear the contempt of the US state apparatus for democratic rights.

For example, the FBI sent a plane to Europe that the CIA had originally used for the abduction of "alleged and actual" terrorists. Snowden's father was to unwittingly serve as a decoy to enable the FBI to bring his son onto the plane under the pretext of a health check, and then spirit him to the US.

The programme also documents the forced landing of a Bolivian diplomatic aircraft. Bolivian President Evo Morales was travelling back from a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. During his stay, there were already rumours that Snowden could possibly leave under Morales' protection, especially since Morales had confirmed the acceptance of his asylum claim in an interview.

Assange and WikiLeaks, by Assange's own admission, unleashed these rumours to set the US

authorities on the wrong track. But the response surpassed even Assange's expectations. Under pressure from the United States, several European governments withdrew overflight permission so that the diplomatic jet was forced to land in Austria.

This step was very risky for the US and drew some criticism internationally, since fundamental international laws were broken. In the end, Russia agreed to grant Snowden asylum and let him enter the country.

The prosecution and conviction of Chelsea (Bradley) Manning is also cited in the documentary to demonstrate what Snowden could have expected had he been deported to the US. Manning was a member of the US Army and an IT specialist with access to databases containing classified documents. He provided large amounts of secret information about the war in Iraq and the detention camp in Guantanamo Bay, as well as on the diplomatic cables to WikiLeaks.

An example was made of Manning, who was given a sentence of 35 years in prison, building up the threat against Snowden. Although Snowden was well aware of this danger, his indignation and sense of responsibility led him to release detailed documents showing the range of the spy programmes of the US intelligence agencies. He thereby gave the world's population a chilling view into the magnitude of the criminal activities of US intelligence agencies and their allies.

Hunting Snowden includes several excerpts from interviews with Michael Hayden, in which the former CIA director repeats, mantra-like, the need for spy programmes and their secrecy. He delivers this threat: "A lot of people like me would never consider an amnesty or any deal with Snowden."



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