

Jane McAlevey: We Need Syriza in Illinois



Edward Snowden: A 'Nation' Interview

In a wide-ranging conversation, he discusses the surveillance state, the American political system and the price he's paid for his understanding of patriotism.

Katrina vanden Heuvel and Stephen F. Cohen October 28, 2014 | This article appeared in the November 17, 2014 edition of *The Nation*.

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(All photos by Nicola Cohen)

On October 6, *Nation* editor and publisher Katrina vanden Heuvel and contributing editor Stephen F. Cohen (professor emeritus of Russian studies at New York University and Princeton) sat down in Moscow for a wide-ranging discussion with Edward Snowden. Throughout their nearly four-hour conversation, which lasted considerably longer than planned (see below for audio excerpts), the youthful-appearing Snowden was affable, forthcoming, thoughtful and occasionally humorous. Among other issues, he discussed the price he has paid for speaking truth to power, his definition of patriotism and accountability, and his frustration with America's media and political system. The interview has been edited and abridged for publication, compressing lengthy conversations about technological issues that Snowden has discussed elsewhere.

The Nation : It's very good to be here with you. We visit Moscow often for our work and to see old friends, but you didn't choose to be in Russia. Are you able to use your time here to work and have some kind of social life? Or do you feel confined and bored?

Snowden: I describe myself as an indoor cat, because I'm a computer guy and I always have been. I don't go out and play football and stuff—that's not me. I want to think, I want to build, I want to talk, I want to create. So, ever since I've been here, my life has been consumed with work that's actually fulfilling and satisfying.

The Nation : You have everything you need to continue your work?

Snowden: Yes. You know, I don't spend all day running hand-on-hat from shadowy figures—I'm in exile. My government revoked my passport intentionally to leave me exiled. If they really wanted to capture me, they would've allowed me to travel to Latin America, because the CIA can operate with impunity down there. They did not want that; they chose to keep me in Russia.

The Nation : We understand you're not a person who gives a high priority to social life, but do you have some here in Moscow?

Snowden: Yeah, I've got more than enough for my needs, let's put it that way.

The Nation : If you feel like just getting together and chatting with people, you can?

Snowden: Yeah, I can. And I do go out. I've been recognized every now and then. It's always in computer stores. It's something like brain associations, because I'll be in the grocery store and nobody will recognize me. Even in my glasses, looking exactly like my picture, nobody will recognize me. But I could be totally clean-shaven, hat on, looking nothing like myself in a computer store, and they're like, "Snowden?!"

The Nation : Are they friendly? Are they generally young people?

Snowden: Yeah, yeah.

The Nation : Well, your video question at that big Putin press conference this year...

Snowden: Yeah, that was terrible! Oh, Jesus, that blew up in my face. I was hoping to catch Putin in a lie—like what happened to Director of National Intelligence James Clapper [in his congressional testimony]. So I asked Putin basically the same questions about Russian mass surveillance. I knew he's doing the same thing, but he denied it. If a single Russian source would come forward, he would be in hot water. And in the United States, what I did appearing at that Putin press conference was not worth the price.

The Nation : So you don't feel like a prisoner here?

Snowden: No. For example, I went to St. Petersburg—St. Petersburg is awesome.

The Nation : Do you watch television?

Snowden: I do everything on the computer. TV is obsolete technology for me.

The Nation : Do you watch any American TV?

Snowden: Yeah, I've been watching *The Wire* recently.

The Nation : So you still have an active connection with the United States through the Internet? You follow popular culture?

Snowden: [chuckles] Yeah, but I hate these questions—I don't like talking about this stuff, because it's so... to me, it's so ordinary.

The Nation : But it shows you are an American watching series we're all watching in America.

Snowden: Yeah, all that stuff—*Game of Thrones* and all the other series. How about *House of Cards*? As for *Boardwalk Empire*—that's another period of government overreach, but at least they use the amendment process! In real life, the executive branch, by violating the Constitution, is using statutes in place of constitutional amendments to diminish our liberty.

The Nation : How do you do Internet interviews?

Snowden: I built my own studio. I don't have the professional language to describe it because I'm not a videographer—but I'm a technician. So I get the camera, I get all the things that translate the camera to the computer, I set up a live session, I do the security on it, I set up a background so I can key it out, like newscasters do, and replace it with whatever I want—and I can be anywhere I need to be.

The Nation : Which leads us to ask: How did your knowledge as what you call a "technician" begin to affect your political thought?

Snowden: One concern I had while I was working actively in the intelligence community—being someone who had broad access, who was exposed to more reports than average individuals, who had a better understanding of the bigger picture—was that the post-World War II, post-Cold War directions of societies were either broadly authoritarian or [broadly] liberal or libertarian. The authoritarian one believed that an individual's rights were basically provided by governments and were determined by states. The other society—ours—tended to believe that a large portion of our rights were inherent and couldn't be abrogated by governments, even if this seemed necessary. And the question is: Particularly in the post-9/11 era, are societies becoming more liberal or more authoritarian? Are our competitors—for example, China, which is a deeply authoritarian nation—becoming more authoritarian or more liberal over time? Has the center of gravity shifted such that all governments have greater powers and fewer restrictions than they ever had, and are empowered by technology in a way that no government ever was in the past? How do we preserve our civil rights, our traditions as a liberal democracy, in a time when government power is expanding and is more and more difficult to check? Do we want to emulate China in the way that China emulates the West? I think, for most Americans, the answer to that question would be no.

The Nation : Your revelations sparked a debate and caused indignation across political lines. Yet we are seeing very little being done. There is something called the USA Freedom Act, which is watered down to the nth degree, but there's very little real movement. What's your sense of the political system, not just in the United States, but the political system needed to make the reforms commensurate with the scale of your revelations?

Snowden: There is more action in some other countries. In Germany, they've called for a very serious inquiry that's discovering more and more. They've just discovered a significant violation of the German Constitution that had been concealed from the Parliament. In the United States, there hasn't been much legislative change on the surveillance issue, although there are some tepid proposals.

The Nation : Jonathan Schell's last piece for *The Nation*—he died in March—was about you as a dissident, as a disrupter and as a radical defender of privacy. Jonathan asked a fundamental question: What do Americans do when official channels are dysfunctional or unresponsive? Does change require truth-tellers such as yourself?



Snowden: We are a representative democracy. But how did we get there? We got there through direct action. And that's enshrined in our Constitution and in our values. We have the right of revolution. Revolution does not always have to be weapons and warfare; it's also about revolutionary ideas. It's about the principles that we hold to be representative of the kind of world we want to live in. A given order may at any given time fail to represent those values, even work against those values. I think that's the dynamic we're seeing today. We have these traditional political parties that are less and less responsive to the needs of ordinary people, so people are in search of their own values. If the government or the parties won't address our needs, we will. It's about direct action, even civil disobedience. But then the state says: "Well, in order for it to be legitimate civil disobedience, you have to follow these rules." They put us in "free-speech zones"; they say you can only do it at this time, and in this way, and you can't interrupt the functioning of the government. They limit the impact that civil disobedience can achieve. We have to remember that civil disobedience must be disobedience if it's to be effective. If we simply follow the rules that a state imposes upon us when that state is acting contrary to the public interest, we're not actually improving anything. We're not changing anything.

The Nation : **When was the last time civil disobedience brought about change?**

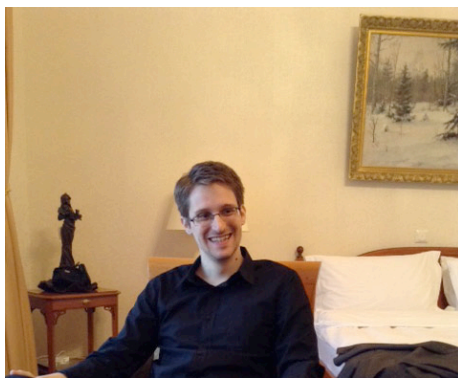
Snowden: Occupy Wall Street.

The Nation : **One of us might disagree with you. Arguably, Occupy was a very important initiative, but it was soon vaporized.**

Snowden: I believe strongly that Occupy Wall Street had such limits because the local authorities were able to enforce, basically in our imaginations, an image of what proper civil disobedience is—one that is simply ineffective. All those people who went out missed work, didn't get paid. Those were individuals who were already feeling the effects of inequality, so they didn't have a lot to lose. And then the individuals who were louder, more disruptive and, in many ways, more effective at drawing attention to their concerns were immediately castigated by authorities. They were cordoned off, pepper-sprayed, thrown in jail.

The Nation : **But you think Occupy nonetheless had an impact?**

Snowden: It had an impact on consciousness. It was not effective in realizing change. But too often we forget that social and political movements don't happen overnight. They don't bring change immediately—you have to build a critical mass of understanding of the issues. But getting inequality out there into the consciousness was important. All these political pundits now talking about the 2014 and 2016 elections are talking about inequality.



The Nation : **You've spoken elsewhere about accountability. Are we witnessing the end of accountability in our country? The people who brought us the financial crisis are back in the saddle. The people who brought us the disaster of the Iraq War are now counseling Washington and the public about US foreign policy today. Or, as you have pointed out, James Clapper lies to Congress without even a**



slap on the wrist.

Snowden: The surveillance revelations are critically important because they revealed that our rights are being redefined in secret, by secret courts that were never intended to have that role—without the consent of the public, without even the awareness of the

majority of our political representatives. However, as important as that is, I don't think it is the most important thing. I think it is the fact that the director of national intelligence gave a false statement to Congress under oath, which is a felony. If we allow our officials to knowingly break the law publicly and face no consequences, we're instituting a culture of immunity, and this is what I think historically will actually be considered the biggest disappointment of the Obama administration. I don't think it's going to be related to social or economic policies; it's going to be the fact that he said let's go forward, not backward, in regard to the violations of law that occurred under the Bush administration. There was a real choice when he became president. It was a very difficult choice—to say, "We're not going to hold senior officials to account with the same laws that every other citizen in the country is held to," or "This is a nation that believes in the rule of law." And the rule of law doesn't mean the police are in charge, but that we all answer to the same laws. You know, if Congress is going to investigate baseball players about whether or not they told the truth, how can we justify giving the most powerful intelligence official, Clapper, a pass? This is how J. Edgar Hoover ended up in charge of the FBI forever.

The Nation : Do you think people on the congressional intelligence committees knew more than other senators and representatives? That they knew they were being told falsehoods and they remained silent?

Snowden: The chairs absolutely do. They're part of the "Gang of Eight." They get briefed on every covert-action program and everything like that. They know where all the bodies are buried. At the same time, they get far more campaign donations than anybody else from defense contractors, from intelligence corporations, from private military companies.

The Nation : This makes us wonder whether or not the Internet actually enhances freedom of speech, and thus democracy? Maybe instead it abets invasion of privacy, reckless opinions, misinformation. What are the Internet's pluses and minuses for the kind of society that you and *The Nation* seek?

Snowden: I would say the first key concept is that, in terms of technological and communication progress in human history, the Internet is basically the equivalent of electronic telepathy. We can now communicate all the time through our little magic smartphones with people who are anywhere, all the time, constantly learning what they're thinking, talking about, exchanging messages. And this is a new capability even within the context of the Internet. When people talk about Web 2.0, they mean that when the Internet, the World Wide Web, first became popular, it was one way only. People would publish their websites; other people would read them. But there was no real back and forth other than through e-mail. Web 2.0 was what they called the collaborative web—Facebook, Twitter, the social media. What we're seeing now, or starting to see, is an atomization of the Internet community. Before, everybody went only to a few sites; now we've got all these boutiques. We've got crazy little sites going up against established media behemoths. And increasingly we're seeing these ultra-partisan sites getting larger and larger readerships because people are self-selecting themselves into communities. I describe it as tribalism because they're very tightly woven communities. Lack of civility is part of it, because that's how Internet

tribes behave. We see this more and more in electoral politics, which have become increasingly poisonous.

All this is a blessing and a curse. It's a blessing because it helps people establish what they value; they understand the sort of ideas they identify with. The curse is that they aren't challenged in their views. The Internet becomes an echo chamber. Users don't see the counterarguments. And I think we're going to see a move away from that, because young people—digital natives who spend their life on the Internet—get saturated. It's like a fashion trend, and becomes a sign of a lack of sophistication. On the other hand, the Internet is there to fill needs that people have for information and socialization. We get this sort of identification thing going on nowadays because it's a very fractious time. We live in a time of troubles.

***The Nation* : What do you think will emerge from this time of troubles?**

Snowden: Look at the reactions of liberal governments to the surveillance revelations during the last year. In the United States, we've got this big debate, but we've got official paralysis—because they're the ones who had their hand caught most deeply in the cookie jar. And there are unquestionable violations of our Constitution. Many of our ally states don't have these constitutional protections—in the UK, in New Zealand, in Australia. They've lost the right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure without probable cause. All of those countries, in the wake of these surveillance revelations, rushed through laws that were basically ghostwritten by the National Security Agency to enable mass surveillance without court oversight, without all of the standard checks and balances that one would expect. Which leads us inevitably to the question: Where are we going to reject that easy but flawed process of letting the intelligence services do whatever they want? It's inevitable that it will happen. I think it's going to be where Internet businesses go.

For example, Microsoft is in a court battle with the Department of Justice. The DOJ is saying, "We want information from your data center in Ireland. It's not about a US citizen, but we want it." Microsoft said, "OK, fine. Go to a judge in Ireland. Ask them for a warrant. We have a mutual legal-assistance treaty. They'll do it. Give that to us, and we'll provide the information to you in accordance with Irish laws." The DOJ said, "No, you're an American company, and we have access to your data everywhere. It doesn't matter about jurisdiction. It doesn't matter about who it's regarding." This is a landmark legal case that's now going through the appeals process. And it matters because if we allow the United States to set the precedent that national borders don't matter when it comes to the protection of people's information, other countries are watching. They're paying attention to our examples and what is normative behavior in terms of dealing with digital information.

***The Nation* : They still look to us?**

Snowden: They still look to us. But just as importantly, our adversaries do as well. So the question becomes what does, for example, the government in the Democratic Republic of Congo or China do the next time they've got a dissident Nobel Peace Prize nominee and they want to read his e-mail, and it's in an Irish data center? They're going to say to Microsoft, "You handed this stuff over to the DOJ; you're going to hand the same thing over to us." And if Microsoft balks, they'll say, "Look, if you're going to apply different legal standards here than you do there, we're going to sanction you in China. We're going to put business penalties on you that will make you less competitive." And Microsoft will suffer, and therefore our economy will suffer.

***The Nation* : Are countries rebelling against this?**

Snowden: Yes, we see this very strongly, for example, in Brazil. They went to the UN and said, "We need new standards for this." We need to take a look at what they're calling "data sovereignty." Russia recently passed a law—I think a terrible law—which says you have to store all of the data from Russian citizens on Russian soil just to prevent other countries from playing the same kind of legal games we're playing in this Microsoft case.

The Nation : **Why is that terrible as a form of sovereignty? What if all countries did that — wouldn't that break the American monopoly?**

Snowden: It would break the American monopoly, but it would also break Internet business, because you'd have to have a data center in every country. And data centers are tremendously expensive, a big capital investment.

When we talk about the assertion of basically new government privileges with weak or no justification, we don't even have to look at international law to see the failings in them. When we look at how, constitutionally, only Congress can declare war, and that is routinely ignored. Not NATO or the UN, but Congress has to authorize these endless wars, and it isn't.

The Bush administration marked a very serious and profoundly negative turning point—not just for the nation, but for the international order, because we started to govern on the idea of "might makes right." And that's a very old, toxic and infectious idea.

The Nation : **This was a reaction to 9/11?**

Snowden: A reaction in many ways to 9/11, but also to the Dick Cheney idea of the unitary executive. They needed a pretext for the expansion of not simply federal power, but executive power in particular.

The Nation : **But how is this new? The White House was doing the same thing in the Watergate scandal, tapping phones and breaking in.**

Snowden: But the arc has continued. Richard Nixon got kicked out of Washington for tapping one hotel suite. Today we're tapping every American citizen in the country, and no one has been put on trial for it or even investigated. We don't even have an inquiry into it.

The Nation : **In the 1970s, the Church Senate Committee investigated and tried to rein in such things, but we've seen the erosion of those reforms.**



Snowden: That's the key—to maintain the garden of liberty, right? This is a generational thing that we must all do continuously. We only have the rights that we protect. It doesn't matter what we say or think we have. It's not enough to believe in something; it matters what we actually defend. So when we think in the context of the last decade's infringements upon personal liberty and the last year's revelations, it's not about surveillance. It's about liberty. When people say, "I have nothing to hide," what they're saying is, "My rights don't matter." Because you don't need to justify your rights as a citizen—that inverts the model of responsibility. The government must justify its intrusion into your rights. If you stop defending your rights by saying, "I don't need them in this context" or "I can't understand this," they are no longer rights. You have ceded the concept of your own rights. You've converted them into something you get as a revocable privilege from the government, something that can be abrogated at its convenience. And that has diminished the measure of liberty within a society.

***The Nation* :** That's a fundamental, conservative American idea, going back to inalienable rights.

Snowden: I wonder if it's conservative or liberal, because when we think of liberal thought, when we think about the relation to liberty, we're talking about traditional conservatism—as opposed to today's conservatism, which no longer represents those views.

***The Nation* :** Every president—and this seems to be confirmed by history—will seek to maximize his or her power, and will see modern-day surveillance as part of that power. Who is going to restrain presidential power in this regard?

Snowden: That's why we have separate and co-equal branches. Maybe it will be Congress, maybe not. Might be the courts, might not. But the idea is that, over time, one of these will get the courage to do so. One of the saddest and most damaging legacies of the Bush administration is the increased assertion of the "state secrets" privilege, which kept organizations like the ACLU—which had cases of people who had actually been tortured and held in indefinite detention—from getting their day in court. The courts were afraid to challenge executive declarations of what would happen. Now, over the last year, we have seen—in almost every single court that has had this sort of national-security case—that they have become markedly more skeptical. People at civil-liberties organizations say it's a sea change, and that it's very clear judges have begun to question more critically assertions made by the executive. Even though it seems so obvious now, it is extraordinary in the context of the last decade, because courts had simply said they were not the best branch to adjudicate these claims—which is completely wrong, because they are the only nonpolitical branch. They are the branch that is specifically charged with deciding issues that cannot be impartially decided by politicians. The power of the presidency is important, but it is not determinative. Presidents should not be exempted from the same standards of reason and evidence and justification that any other citizen or civil movement should be held to. By the way, I must say I'm surprised by how skeptical of the Obama administration *The Nation* has been.

***The Nation* :** Critics have long talked about the unwarranted power of "the deep state."

Snowden: There's definitely a deep state. Trust me, I've been there.



The Nation : About this secretive deep state, are you hopeful? Your revelations are so sweeping, people might think there's nothing we can do. Or they might lead to actions that challenge, even dismantle, these anti-democratic forces.

Snowden: Well, we've already seen, in practically every country around the world where these issues have been covered, that the general public has recoiled at the ideology behind these programs.

The Nation : I'm sure you've heard this, but in German suburbs there are signs in the windows of homes saying "I have a bed for Ed."

Snowden: It's fascinating to see how things have changed. Basically, every time the US government gets off the soapbox of the Sunday-morning talk shows, the average American's support for the surveillance revelations grows. People in both parties from the congressional intelligence committees—all these co-opted officials who play cheerleader for spy agencies—go on these Sunday shows and they say: "Snowden was a traitor. He works against Americans. He works for the Chinese. Oh, wait, he left Hong Kong—he works for the Russians." And when I leave Russia, they'll go, "Oh, he works for," I don't know—"Finland," or something like that. It doesn't matter that even the FBI has said it's not the case and there's no evidence for it. They're trying to affect public opinion. But people do not like being lied to, and they do not like having their rights violated. So as soon as they stop making these arguments, you see support for me starts to rise.

The Nation : Say there was a national Gallup poll formulating the question like this: "Mr. Snowden has revealed gross violations of your personal liberties and rights through surveillance by the American government. The American government argues it does so to keep you safe from terrorists." Do you think there would be a majority opinion in your favor? You've raised perhaps the most vital issue of our time, but for most Americans, who really are having a harder economic time than they should be having, your issue probably is not high on their list of concerns.

Snowden: OK, let me clarify. When I talk about the polling, I'm talking about the principles. It

shows these officials are knowingly attempting to shift public opinion, even though they know what they say is not factual. It's clear it's public opinion, because elite opinion... I mean, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* came out and said, "Hey, clemency for Snowden." But for me, the key—and I've said this from the beginning: it's not about me. I don't care if I get clemency. I don't care what happens to me. I don't care if I end up in jail or Guantánamo or whatever, kicked out of a plane with two gunshots in the face. I did what I did because I believe it is the right thing to do, and I will continue to do that. However, when it comes to political engagement, I'm not a politician—I'm an engineer. I read these polls because civil-liberties organizations tell me I need to be aware of public opinion. The only reason I do these interviews—I hate talking about myself, I hate doing this stuff—is because incredibly well-meaning people, whom I respect and trust, tell me that this will help bring about positive changes. It's not going to cause a sea change, but it will benefit the public.

From the very beginning, I said there are two tracks of reform: there's the political and the technical. I don't believe the political will be successful, for exactly the reasons you underlined. The issue is too abstract for average people, who have too many things going on in their lives. And we do not live in a revolutionary time. People are not prepared to contest power. We have a system of education that is really a sort of euphemism for indoctrination. It's not designed to create critical thinkers. We have a media that goes along with the government by parroting phrases intended to provoke a certain emotional response—for example, "national security." Everyone says "national security" to the point that we now must use the term "national security." But it is not national security that they're concerned with; it is state security. And that's a key distinction. We don't like to use the phrase "state security" in the United States because it reminds us of all the bad regimes. But it's a key concept, because when these officials are out on TV, they're not talking about what's good for you. They're not talking about what's good for business. They're not talking about what's good for society. They're talking about the protection and perpetuation of a national state system.

I'm not an anarchist. I'm not saying, "Burn it to the ground." But I'm saying we need to be aware of it, and we need to be able to distinguish when political developments are occurring that are contrary to the public interest. And that cannot happen if we do not question the premises on which they're founded. And that's why I don't think political reform is likely to succeed. [Senators] Udall and Wyden, on the intelligence committee, have been sounding the alarm, but they are a minority.

***The Nation* : Explain the technical reform you mentioned.**

Snowden: We already see this happening. The issue I brought forward most clearly was that of mass surveillance, not of surveillance in general. It's OK if we wiretap Osama bin Laden. I want to know what he's planning—obviously not him nowadays, but that kind of thing. I don't care if it's a pope or a bin Laden. As long as investigators must go to a judge—an independent judge, a real judge, not a secret judge—and make a showing that there's probable cause to issue a warrant, then they can do that. And that's how it should be done. The problem is when they monitor all of us, en masse, all of the time, without any specific justification for intercepting in the first place, without any specific judicial showing that there's a probable cause for that infringement of our rights.

Since the revelations, we have seen a massive sea change in the technological basis and makeup of the Internet. One story revealed that the NSA was unlawfully collecting data from the data centers of Google and Yahoo. They were intercepting the transactions of data centers of American companies, which should not be allowed in the first place because American companies are considered US persons, sort of, under our surveillance authorities. They say, "Well, we were doing it overseas," but that falls under a different Reagan-era authority: EO 12333, an executive order for foreign-intelligence collection, as opposed to the

ones we now use domestically. So this one isn't even authorized by law. It's just an old-ass piece of paper with Reagan's signature on it, which has been updated a couple times since then. So what happened was that all of a sudden these massive, behemoth companies realized their data centers—sending hundreds of millions of people's communications back and forth every day—were completely unprotected, electronically naked. GCHQ, the British spy agency, was listening in, and the NSA was getting the data and everything like that, because they could dodge the encryption that was typically used. Basically, the way it worked technically, you go from your phone to Facebook.com, let's say—that link is encrypted. So if the NSA is trying to watch it here, they can't understand it. But what these agencies discovered was, the Facebook site that your phone is connected to is just the front end of a larger corporate network—that's not actually where the data comes from. When you ask for your Facebook page, you hit this part and it's protected, but it has to go on this long bounce around the world to actually get what you're asking for and go back. So what they did was just get out of the protected part and they went onto the back network. They went into the private network of these companies.

***The Nation* : The companies knew this?**

Snowden: Companies did not know it. They said, "Well, we gave the NSA the front door; we gave you the PRISM program. You could get anything you wanted from our companies anyway—all you had to do was ask us and we're gonna give it to you." So the companies couldn't have imagined that the intelligence communities would break in the back door, too—but they did, because they didn't have to deal with the same legal process as when they went through the front door. When this was published by Barton Gellman in *The Washington Post* and the companies were exposed, Gellman printed a great anecdote: he showed two Google engineers a slide that showed how the NSA was doing this, and the engineers "exploded in profanity."

Another example—one document I revealed was the classified inspector general's report on a Bush surveillance operation, Stellar Wind, which basically showed that the authorities knew it was unlawful at the time. There was no statutory basis; it was happening basically on the president's say-so and a secret authorization that no one was allowed to see. When the DOJ said, "We're not gonna reauthorize this because it is not lawful," Cheney—or one of Cheney's advisers—went to Michael Hayden, director of the NSA, and said, "There is no lawful basis for this program. DOJ is not going to reauthorize it, and we don't know what we're going to do. Will you continue it anyway on the president's say-so?" Hayden said yes, even though he knew it was unlawful and the DOJ was against it. Nobody has read this document because it's like twenty-eight pages long, even though it's incredibly important.

***The Nation* : Your revelations also influenced the development of the iPhone 6's encryption technology, which the government is saying will impede rightful law enforcement.**

Snowden: This is the key. The big tech companies understood that the government had not only damaged American principles, it had hurt their businesses. They thought, "No one trusts our products anymore." So they decided to fix these security flaws to secure their phones. The new iPhone has encryption that protects the contents of the phone. This means if someone steals your phone—if a hacker or something images your phone—they can't read what's on the phone itself, they can't look at your pictures, they can't see the text messages you send, and so forth. But it does not stop law enforcement from tracking your movements via geolocation on the phone if they think you are involved in a kidnapping case, for example. It does not stop law enforcement from requesting copies of your texts from the providers via warrant. It does not stop them from accessing copies of your pictures or

whatever that are uploaded to, for example, Apple's cloud service, which are still legally accessible because those are not encrypted. It only protects what's physically on the phone. This is purely a security feature that protects against the kind of abuse that can happen with all these things being out there undetected. In response, the attorney general and the FBI director jumped on a soap box and said, "You are putting our children at risk."

The Nation : Is there a potential conflict between massive encryption and the lawful investigation of crimes?

Snowden: This is the controversy that the attorney general and the FBI director were trying to create. They were suggesting, "We have to be able to have lawful access to these devices with a warrant, but that is technically not possible on a secure device. The only way that is possible is if you compromise the security of the device by leaving a back door." We've known that these back doors are not secure. I talk to cryptographers, some of the leading technologists in the world, all the time about how we can deal with these issues. It is not possible to create a back door that is only accessible, for example, to the FBI. And even if it were, you run into the same problem with international commerce: if you create a device that is famous for compromised security and it has an American back door, nobody is gonna buy it. Anyway, it's not true that the authorities cannot access the content of the phone even if there is no back door. When I was at the NSA, we did this every single day, even on Sundays. I believe that encryption is a civic responsibility, a civic duty.

The Nation : For the first time, we understand it's a civil-rights issue.

Snowden: It's good for me that you're saying this too, because my whole model, from the beginning, was not to personally publish a single document. I provided these documents to journalists because I didn't want my biases to decide what's in the public interest and what is not.

The Nation : You are suggesting you don't want to play a political role, but that train has left the station.

Snowden: Ha, you sound like the ACLU.

The Nation : You have a dilemma. We've known or studied a lot of "holy fools," as Russians say—determined dissidents who gave up everything for a principle. But eventually people will want to know the next chapter of your life, and it will have to be advocacy. You can't avoid it. You can't say, "Well, I'm just a high-tech guy, I let you in on secrets—now leave me alone."

Snowden: Aren't you familiar with Cincinnatus? That's the first alias I used.

The Nation : You really think that if you could go home tomorrow with complete immunity, there wouldn't be irresistible pressure on you to become a spokesperson, even an activist, on behalf of our rights and liberties? Indeed, wouldn't that now be your duty?

Snowden: But the idea for me now—because I'm not a politician, and I do not think I am as effective in this way as people who actually prepare for it—is to focus on technical reform, because I speak the language of technology. I spoke with Tim Berners-Lee, the guy who invented the World Wide Web. We agree on the necessity for this generation to create what he calls the Magna Carta for the Internet. We want to say what "digital rights" should be. What values should we be protecting, and how do we assert them? What I can do—

because I am a technologist, and because I actually understand how this stuff works under the hood—is to help create the new systems that reflect our values. Of course I want to see political reform in the United States. But we could pass the best surveillance reforms, the best privacy protections in the history of the world, in the United States, and it would have zero impact internationally. Zero impact in China and in every other country, because of their national laws—they won't recognize our reforms; they'll continue doing their own thing. But if someone creates a reformed technical system today—technical standards must be identical around the world for them to function together.

The Nation : Creating a new system may be your transition, but it's also a political act.

Snowden: In case you haven't noticed, I have a somewhat sneaky way of effecting political change. I don't want to directly confront great powers, which we cannot defeat on their terms. They have more money, more clout, more airtime. We cannot be effective without a mass movement, and the American people today are too comfortable to adapt to a mass movement. But as inequality grows, the basic bonds of social fraternity are fraying—as we discussed in regard to Occupy Wall Street. As tensions increase, people will become more willing to engage in protest. But that moment is not now.

The Nation : Some years ago, The Nation did a special issue on patriotism. We asked about a hundred people how they define it. How do you define patriotism? And related to that, you're probably the world's most famous whistleblower, though you don't like that term. What characterization of your role do you prefer?

Snowden: What defines patriotism, for me, is the idea that one rises to act on behalf of one's country. As I said before, that's distinct from acting to benefit the government—a distinction that's increasingly lost today. You're not patriotic just because you back whoever's in power today or their policies. You're patriotic when you work to improve the lives of the people of your country, your community and your family. Sometimes that means making hard choices, choices that go against your personal interest. People sometimes say I broke an oath of secrecy—one of the early charges leveled against me. But it's a fundamental misunderstanding, because there is no oath of secrecy for people who work in the intelligence community. You are asked to sign a civil agreement, called a Standard Form 312, which basically says if you disclose classified information, they can sue you; they can do this, that and the other. And you risk going to jail. But you are also asked to take an oath, and that's the oath of service. The oath of service is not to secrecy, but to the Constitution—to protect it against all enemies, foreign and domestic. That's the oath that I kept, that James Clapper and former NSA director Keith Alexander did not. You raise your hand and you take the oath in your class when you are on board. All government officials are made to do it who work for the intelligence agencies—at least, that's where I took the oath.

As for labeling someone a whistleblower, I think it does them—it does all of us—a disservice, because it "otherizes" us. Using the language of heroism, calling Daniel Ellsberg a hero, and calling the other people who made great sacrifices heroes—even though what they have done *is* heroic—is to distinguish them from the civic duty they performed, and excuses the rest of us from the same civic duty to speak out when we see something wrong, when we witness our government engaging in serious crimes, abusing power, engaging in massive historic violations of the Constitution of the United States. We have to speak out or we are party to that bad action.

The Nation : Maybe there should be a special course early on for children about patriotic duty to the Constitution.



Snowden: It also comes down to parenting. It is important to know what your beliefs are, and that you have to stand up for them or you don't really believe in them. You know, my father and mother—in fact, every member of my immediate family—have worked for the federal government. Sometimes misunderstood is that I didn't stand up to overthrow the system. What I wanted to do was give society the information it needed to decide if it wanted to change the system.

The Nation : If you believe in representative government, the most direct approach would be to demand that candidates for Congress pledge, if elected, to make every effort to know what the surveillance community is doing and to limit it in the ways you've specified. And perhaps, in addition to peppering judicial nominees with questions about abortion, ask how they're going to rule on surveillance issues.

Snowden: There's a real danger in the way our representative government functions today. It functions properly only when paired with accountability. Candidates run for election on campaign promises, but once they're elected they renege on those promises, which happened with President Obama on Guantánamo, the surveillance programs and investigating the crimes of the Bush administration. These were very serious campaign promises that were not fulfilled. I considered bringing forward information about these surveillance programs prior to the election, but I held off because I believed that Obama was genuine when he said he was going to change things. I wanted to give the democratic process time to work.

The Nation : Considering your personal experience—the risks you took, and now your fate here in Moscow—do you think other young men or women will be inspired or discouraged from doing what you did?

Snowden: Chelsea Manning got thirty-five years in prison, while I'm still free. I talk to people in the ACLU office in New York all the time. I'm able to participate in the debate and to campaign for reform. I'm just the first to come forward in the manner that I did and succeed. When governments go too far to punish people for actions that are dissent rather than a real threat to the nation, they risk delegitimizing not just their systems of justice, but the legitimacy of the government itself. Because when they bring political charges against people for acts that were clearly at least intended to work in the public interest, they deny them the opportunity to mount a public-interest defense. The charges they brought against me, for example, explicitly denied my ability to make a public-interest defense. There were no whistleblower protections that would've protected me—and that's known to everybody in the intelligence community. There are no proper channels for making this information available when the system fails comprehensively.

The government would assert that individuals who are aware of serious wrongdoing in the intelligence community should bring their concerns to the people most responsible for that wrongdoing, and rely on those people to correct the problems that those people themselves authorized. Going all the way back to Daniel Ellsberg, it is clear that the government is not concerned with damage to national security, because in none of these cases was there damage. At the trial of Chelsea Manning, the government could point to no case of specific

damage that had been caused by the massive revelation of classified information. The charges are a reaction to the government's embarrassment more than genuine concern about these activities, or they would substantiate what harms were done. We're now more than a year since my NSA revelations, and despite numerous hours of testimony before Congress, despite tons of off-the-record quotes from anonymous officials who have an ax to grind, not a single US official, not a single representative of the United States government, has ever pointed to a single case of individualized harm caused by these revelations. This, despite the fact that former NSA director Keith Alexander said this would cause grave and irrevocable harm to the nation. Some months after he made that statement, the new director of the NSA, Michael Rogers, said that, in fact, he doesn't see the sky falling. It's not so serious after all.

***The Nation* :** Considering that tacit exoneration, if you were given a fair trial in the United States, it could be a historic opportunity for you to defend all the principles involved.

Snowden: I've talked to a lot of pretty good lawyers around the world. I'm non-extraditable. That's the real reason the US government was pissed off, even when I was initially in Hong Kong. The only way I could be extradited is through the principle of what my lawyers call "politics trumps law." If it comes to a question of law, the charges they brought against me—the Espionage Act—is called the quintessential political crime. A political crime, in legal terms, is defined as any crime against a state, as opposed to against an individual. Assassination, for example, is not a political crime because you've killed a person, an individual, and they've been harmed; their family's been harmed. But the state itself, you can't be extradited for harming it.

***The Nation* :** But if you could get a guarantee of a fair trial?

Snowden: [laughs] Trust me, we're not getting that guarantee, because the US administration does not want me to return. People forget how I ended up in Russia. They waited until I departed Hong Kong to cancel my passport in order to trap me in Russia, because it's the most effective attack they have against me, given the political climate in the United States. If they can show I'm in Russia and pretend that I wear "I Heart Putin" shirts....

***The Nation* :** Maybe this is a stretch, but you remind us a bit of the great Soviet-era dissident, Andrei Sakharov.

Snowden: I'm familiar with his reputation, but I don't know his personal history at all.

***The Nation* :** He was the co-creator of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, a nuclear scientist. He began to worry about what he'd created, and eventually began to protest government policies. But he didn't prefer the word "dissident" because, like you, he said: "First, the Soviet Constitution says I have every political right to do what I am doing. And second, the Soviet government is violating its own Constitution, while the people do not know what the government is doing in its name."

Snowden: [laughs] Wow, that sounds familiar. It's interesting that you mention Sakharov's creative axis—he had produced something for the government that he then realized was something other than he intended. That's something [NSA whistleblower] Bill Binney and I share. Binney designed ThinThread, an NSA program that used encryption to try to make mass surveillance less objectionable. It would still have been unlawful and unconstitutional. Binney will argue with you all day about it, but his idea was that it would collect everything about everybody but be immediately encrypted so no one could read it. Only a court could

give intelligence officials the key to decrypt it. The idea was to find a kind of a compromise between [privacy rights and] the assertion that if you don't collect things as they happen, you won't have them later—because what the NSA really wants is the capability of retrospective investigation. They want to have a perfect record of the last five years of your life, so when you come to their attention, they can know everything about you. I'm not down with that, but Binney was trying to create something like that.

The Nation : You also remind us of [Manhattan Project physicist] Robert Oppenheimer —what he created and then worried about.

Snowden: Someone recently talked about mass surveillance and the NSA revelations as being the atomic moment for computer scientists. The atomic bomb was the moral moment for physicists. Mass surveillance is the same moment for computer scientists, when they realize that the things they produce can be used to harm a tremendous number of people.

It is interesting that so many people who become disenchanted, who protest against their own organizations, are people who contributed something to them and then saw how it was misused. When I was working in Japan, I created a system for ensuring that intelligence data was globally recoverable in the event of a disaster. I was not aware of the scope of mass surveillance. I came across some legal questions when I was creating it. My superiors pushed back and were like, "Well, how are we going to deal with this data?" And I was like, "I didn't even know it existed." Later, when I found out that we were collecting more information on American communications than we were on Russian communications, for example, I was like, "Holy shit." Being confronted with the realization that work you intended to benefit people is being used against them has a radicalizing effect.

The Nation : As we said, we come to Russia a lot. Maybe you don't want to talk too much about Russia?

Snowden: [chuckles] At all.

The Nation : Why not? Everybody knows you ended up here by no choice of your own.

Snowden: You would be surprised how effective, at least for influencing low-information voters, negative propaganda about me is. Maybe boutique media, maybe people who are reading papers and talking to academics and whatnot, maybe they understand, because they're high-information. But a lot of people are still unaware that I never intended to end up in Russia. They're not aware that journalists were live-tweeting pictures of my seat on the flight to Latin America I wasn't able to board because the US government revoked my passport. There are even a few who still honestly believe I sold information to Putin—like personally, in exchange for asylum. And this is after the Senate Intelligence Committee chair, who gets to read the NSA's reporting on my activities every morning, said all of these conspiracies are delusional.

The Nation : We have a sense, or certainly the hope, we'll be seeing you in America soon—perhaps sometime after this Ukrainian crisis ends.

Snowden: I would love to think that, but we've gone all the way up the chain at all the levels, and things like that. A political decision has been made not to irritate the intelligence community. The spy agencies are really embarrassed, they're really sore—the revelations really hurt their mystique. The last ten years, they were getting the *Zero Dark Thirty* treatment—they're the heroes. The surveillance revelations bring them back to Big Brother kind of narratives, and they don't like that at all. The Obama administration almost appears

as though it is afraid of the intelligence community. They're afraid of death by a thousand cuts—you know, leaks and things like that.

The Nation : Speaking of films, we understand that in addition to Laura Poitras's documentary *Citizenfour*, a couple of others will be made about you.

Snowden: Anything to get people talking about the issues is great. I'm not a movie guy. I don't know all this stuff that comes with celebrity. I don't know who the actors will be and stuff like that. But anybody who wants to talk about the issues—that's great.

The Nation : You already are a celebrity.

Snowden: People say that, but I've only had to sign autographs for "civ-libs" types. And I autograph court orders.

The Nation : Maybe, but you need a strategy of how you're going to use your celebrity, for better or worse. You own it. You can't get rid of it.

Snowden: *[laughs]* Well, that's kind of damning!

The Nation : And you don't know what lies ahead. Fortune sometimes turns very suddenly, unexpectedly.

Snowden: Then let's hope the surprises are good ones.

The Nation : You've given us a lot of time, and we are very grateful, as will be *The Nation*'s and other readers. But before we end, any more thoughts about your future?

Snowden: If I had to guess what the future's going to look like for me—assuming it's not an orange jumpsuit in a hole—I think I'm going to alternate between tech and policy. I think we need that. I think that's actually what's missing from government, for the most part. We've got a lot of policy people, but we have no technologists, even though technology is such a big part of our lives. It's just amazing, because even these big Silicon Valley companies, the masters of the universe or whatever, haven't engaged with Washington until recently. They're still playing catch-up.

As for my personal politics, some people seem to think I'm some kind of archlibertarian, a hyper-conservative. But when it comes to social policies, I believe women have the right to make their own choices, and inequality is a really important issue. As a technologist, I see the trends, and I see that automation inevitably is going to mean fewer and fewer jobs. And if we do not find a way to provide a basic income for people who have no work, or no meaningful work, we're going to have social unrest that could get people killed. When we have increasing production—year after year after year—some of that needs to be reinvested in society. It doesn't need to be consistently concentrated in these venture-capital funds and things like that. I'm not a communist, a socialist or a radical. But these issues have to be addressed.

Katrina vanden Heuvel and Stephen F. Cohen October 28, 2014 | This article appeared in the November 17, 2014 edition of *The Nation*.

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Dookie Boot • 4 months ago

Excellent interview. Another shining example why The Nation should be read by people of all political persuasions.

54 • Reply • Share



AI • 4 months ago

I admire this young gentleman's humility and courage. Keep up the good work, man. The world needs it.

42 • Reply • Share



2noame • 4 months ago

Already considered myself indebted for everything Snowden has done, but to hear him now even come out in support of a basic income... Amazing. This is indeed a major issue those who don't really understand technology don't yet comprehend. Unless we enact a basic income guarantee as policy, technology will continue to accelerate inequality, and social unrest will become an increasing danger to economic and political stability.

56 • Reply • Share



fabian955 > 2noame • 4 months ago

Now how do we get our "progressive media" to consider the B.I.G.? For years, they and the Democrats have been laser-focused on the better off, the middle class consumers and campaign donors, utterly unconcerned about our poverty crisis. Regardless of one's notions about the poor, the reality remains that we're on an unsustainable course. Consider that the overall quality of life in the US was rated at #1 when Reagan was first elected, launching the campaign against those pushed into poverty. By the time Obama was elected, this had plunged to #43. That's a stunningly rapid decline of the US.

16 • Reply • Share



amyinnh > fabian955 • 3 months ago

We don't. As the traditional media is dominated with a chokehold limited to their own best Wall St interests, the web news and collaboration becomes more and more important. When was the last time you saw any insightful reporting on TV? They've contracted to merely iterating events and speculating on political

tutures.

What the web lacks is convergence into synthesized activity. Proliferation of niche, sometimes overlapping groups: [moveon.org](#), [occupywallst.org](#), etc. etc. fractures momentum. "Send us your money", a failing strategy, since it means conducting opposition on Wall St's terms and turf.

People are looking outward for answers and I believe a lot of this demise is built and funded on personal behavior. We shovel money at Wall St, are numb to it, and then complain when it's used against us. An IT coworker gave them most of his paycheck, via employee stock purchase and selecting company stock for his 401k, and tech cut a second mortgage to purchase his stock.

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Winston Smith > 2noame • 4 months ago

According to Pikky we need a global wealth tax. Technology helps to increase the growth of national and global income, but if the return on capital is greater than the rate of growth of income, income and wealth inequality increases. Unfortunately it looks like the return on capital will be greater than the rate of growth of income for the foreseeable future.

14   • [Reply](#) • [Share](#) ›



amyinnh > 2noame • 3 months ago

Technology has only been exploited for capital gain. Because they're intention is solely to maximize profit. They've focused on bigger companies and money, not better. Socks and tee shirts made in China, burning a ton of oil to bring them here, is not a result of tech, but of greed. Play it out to its worst conclusion, Wall St has ALL the dollars, and so we, the 99%, stop using them. They make themselves irrelevant as they obsess. News, for example, isn't useful information any more. Do we learn anything when NYC mass media says the economy is booming, when what we live has no relationship to their definition of "economy", solely Wall St?

Tech is like water, it's everywhere and unrestrained. It is the reason the planet knows of Snowden revelations, and the depth of Washington corruption by Wall St. If you solely look to Washington for answers, they're a lost cause. Tech's yet to be exploited to undo the concentration of multinational corporatist one-size-fits-all marketplace answers, which is failing to fit most. And so we restructure our society because they're failing. We take up cooking because the "food" in the stores is polluted, we start a garden in the yard, we shop at farmers' markets, we buy used and repurposed goods, hire independent primary care physicians, etc. A turning away from the big ugly of Wall St and Washington.

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Anomaly • 4 months ago

An amazing read. Am I the only one who sees a lot of the Zeitgeist movement emerging from what Edward Snowden alludes to in his final thoughts? I wonder if he and Peter Joseph have ever had a chance to share a discussion. Regardless, Snowden changed my life entirely. Before his revelations about the NSA the most political thing I had ever done was stop using a popular bridge in my local area because they enforced a toll on it (after having used it my entire adult life). I needed perspective to better channel my ability to interpret policies, and Snowden was the one who provided the correct scope and scale for that. I, in turn, have helped friends and family become better at interpreting policies, by explaining the revelations in ways that are understandably to them, and in the last year I have seen absolutely dormant people chiming in intelligently on topics that were never even in the realm of possibility before.

The socioeconomic boiling point Snowden alluded to has already begun. I firmly predict we will see a massive paradigm shift in 10 years. The better we prepare fellow civilians with the ability to interpret policies now, the less violent the shift will likely be. Start talking with your family and friends now.

30   • Reply • Share ›



fabian955 > Anomaly • 4 months ago

I find it impossible to be optimistic about the US. Think about it. From FDR to Reagan, the US had implemented a range of policies and programs that took the country to its height of wealth and productivity. We then chose to reverse course, with the inevitable consequences. In a nutshell, it's impossible to save -- much less, rebuild! -- the middle class without shoring up the poor, and we won't do that. Even (media) libs implicitly preach the message that our corporate state is so successful, everyone is able to work and there are jobs for all who need one, therefore no need for poverty relief. We've been in this mess before, when the richest few took control over govt, to the great harm of the nation (Great Depression, etc.). Each time in the past, the poor and middle class, workers and the jobless, ultimately united to push back -- to everyone's benefit. That can't happen today.

8   • Reply • Share ›



Seer Clearly > fabian955 • 4 months ago

Fabian955: Well, it *could* happen, but only if consciousness shifts. Unfortunately, it will take some kind of drastic event to do that, which is what happened with the Great Depression.

1   • Reply • Share ›



Anomaly > Seer Clearly • 4 months ago

Fortunately for us, such a dramatic shift does not need to be catastrophic or cataclysmic. Look at Snowden. He basically had some information on a thumb drive, and he changed the world without a single drop of blood. The risk of his own blood was immensely high, but because of his ingenuity, he was able to ping all of our senses with one single moment of clear thought, without requiring anything in exchange. That is the key to drastic change, is creating something that would not have existed otherwise, even an idea.

The internet is a global consciousness that is capable of spreading ideas at nearly the speed of light. We just haven't begun to think of it like that yet. We concern ourselves with the monetary incentives for creating or performing work, but what we fail to realize is that requiring something in return is what keeps us from changing the world. It keeps us playing by a set of rules in a game that is rigged.

[see more](#)

9   • Reply • Share ›



Joseph Chavez > Anomaly • 4 months ago

well said, but the Snowden=me analogy is thin. He had valuable information. I don't. I can only see the world as it passes without stopping it. I do however know what is going on as it passes. I suppose if there were enough of me that I might be able to change something.

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amyinnh > Joseph Chavez • 3 months ago

vote carries WAY more weight than any November election. Look at your spending, what are you supporting? Bank fees, 401K fees and credit card purchases are direct IV drips of cash into Wall St. 85 cents out of every dollar spent at national chains leave our communities immediately.

Second, every single person has value and valuable information. We are constrained from that thought from early childhood, shaped through our education to become employee whores, anything for a buck jobs. Go for a long walk and remember what it is that lit your fire, before you were superimposed with school grades judging your math, reading, science, etc. and then invest your time in reigniting that fire. You are uniquely qualified to discover what that is and to grow it. If you need to shed fiscal burden (expensive car, house, ...) to do it, then you have a choice to make don't you?

Lily Tomlin says the problem with winning the rat race, is you still have to be a rat.

1 • Reply • Share ›



Tohmsa Hatrman > Anomaly • 4 months ago

I read the Patriot Act, so I knew what the government could, and would, do. The revelations were no surprise. They have done little but cause embarrassment and enhanced security for the true enemies of freedom. I have been a member of ACLU for fifty years, so I am not an opponent of civil rights, nor do I favor government secrecy. The world is a nuanced place, and Snowden has made it more black or white. If he typifies the new generation, it is in his hubris: the world is about ME.

3 • Reply • Share ›



amyinnh > Tohmsa Hatrman • 3 months ago

I propose those who are so fearful that they demand absolute safety go imprison themselves and leave the rest of us alone.

• Reply • Share ›



AppletheJack • 4 months ago

"We cannot be effective without a mass movement, and the American people today are too comfortable to adapt to a mass movement. But as inequality grows, the basic bonds of social fraternity are fraying—as we discussed in regard to Occupy Wall Street. As tensions increase, people will become more willing to engage in protest. But that moment is not now"

Yep, pretty much nails that one. Incredible/sobering/inspiring words to keep the fight alive. Community, Education, and Conciousness, baby. Thank you Mr. Snowden for all that you've done for this country. I have a bed for Ed.

24 • Reply • Share ›



jamespannozzi • 4 months ago

Well done Katrina and Stephen !

And to Citizen Hero Snowden, thanks ! We await the demand for his return from exile and full immunity from any prosecution to grow as the full import of his historic action continues to become known to all.

24 • Reply • Share ›



Isaiah Earhart • 4 months ago

Edward Snowden is a hero.

... and it's not an accident.

21   • Reply • Share ›



emirjame • 4 months ago

Great interview - thank you!!!

9   • Reply • Share ›



brent1023 • 4 months ago

Snowden: "A political decision has been made not to irritate the intelligence community. ... The Obama administration almost appears as though it is afraid of the intelligence community."

Has it come to this - the intelligence community has become the new fourth branch of government and it controls the other three?

Could any external danger be greater than that?

7   • Reply • Share ›



PecosinRat > brent1023 • 3 months ago

It has been this way since the successful assassination of JFK. That assassination was accomplished by a broad coalition of Kennedy's enemies. They demonstrated that the deep state could work in the open if it had the cooperation of the highest levels of government. J. Edgar Hoover was that day's equivalent to NSA and LBJ acted out Cheney's part. Hoover used his power over the FBI to find and use the weaknesses in the lives of any who opposed him or who threatened to expose what he and others had done. LBJ provided cover for Hoover's actions. Today NSA uses it's ability to monitor anybody any time in the same way. Add to that the number of journalists, editors, and publishers that are actually on the CIA's payroll and the apparent willingness of the deep state to actually openly kill (e.g. 3000 people in the WTC) and it's easy to see that we are no longer a democracy. President Obama is afraid of the deep state and--as the Kennedy lesson implies--not without reason. His first pronouncement on entering office was that he wasn't going to "look back." In effect, he was saying I'm not going to try to tackle the deep state. However, his acquiescence will not be enough to protect the owners of the deep state this time. Their Achilles heel is 9/11. There, they went too far. The world has in it's mind's eye the video of those buildings falling straight down into the path-of-most-resistance. Eventually, the physical impossibility of this will be acknowledged and we will (as a society) know who the real enemy is.

2   • Reply • Share ›



JMF_mn • 4 months ago

Great interview. A lot of pressure for a young man; he seems to be handling it as well as anyone could.

On the Cheney executive-power thing compared to Watergate, it might be worth nothing that Cheney was specifically influenced by Watergate. He worked for Ford and published a few papers, I believe, about how he felt the post-Watergate restrictions on executive power were wrong. Mean old so-and-so's had a pretty strong influence on how our government operates today.

7   • Reply • Share ›



Connors • 4 months ago

He should read Kropotkin: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files...> and Bookchin: <http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Ana...>

5   • Reply • Share ›



baba b > Connors • 4 months ago

Agreed that it was a great interview...please, I hope that snowden, you will read Kropotkin too...the powers that be maligned the anarchists to simplify their vision as bomb throwing nihilists. But, they had a vision of reorganizing society from the bottom up with communal and collectively

owned cooperatives...realizing that freedom was political, economic, social cultural...the whole nine yards...and more people followed their persuasion than any other body of thought, throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries when then capitalist and centralized socialist parties stifled them...There were brilliant thinkers and writers from every country who were those decentralized socialists...the only reason they did not gain political control was that the decentralized bodies had no effective means of communication. However, we have that now! Power shall devolve to the people once we recreate the positive vision of what we want and where we are going.

10   • Reply • Share ›



Connors > baba b • 4 months ago

Yes, and I mentioned it, because reading the interview, it seems like Snowden would be very receptive to their ideas. He's anti-authoritarian and highly skeptical of power relations. He clearly rejects the statist left, but I think anarchism would really appeal to him. It's also fairly clear to me that he's unfamiliar with anarchist literature.

  • Reply • Share ›



Carolab > Connors • 4 months ago

I think he made it clear he is interested in creating technological solutions, exclusively, and that any particular political philosophy does not engage him at all.

5   • Reply • Share ›



Connors > Carolab • 4 months ago

That's not how I read it, but in any case, if he hasn't been exposed to a political philosophy yet, it's hard to know if he'd be swayed by it, esp. since he's still very young. At 30, he cannot possibly know for sure how his views might evolve.

2   • Reply • Share ›



Carolab > Connors • 4 months ago

True, but he did say he did not stand up to overthrow the system, but rather to give others information they needed to decide whether or not they wanted to change it. It seems he is self-identifying as a change agent and as a patriot, but not as a revolutionary, at least in a political sense.

7   • Reply • Share ›



Connors > Carolab • 4 months ago

Well, anarchists no longer call for a violent overthrow of the state. Rather, the idea is to build a new society from below as an alternative to the state that will ultimately displace it. In a sense, this is gradual and even patriotic change in the sense that it's a call for direct democracy. But it's also revolutionary in its ultimate goal. Based on what he has said, I think Snowden would be open to this idea. As outlined by David Graeber, for instance, in his book *The Democracy Project*.

1   • Reply • Share ›



Carolab > Connors • 4 months ago

Yes, I know. And I imagine Snowden does as well. I believe he meant overthrow in any sense, violent or otherwise. However he does make it clear he believes in participatory, direct democracy.

4   • Reply • Share ›



baba b > Connors • 4 months ago

Agreed...100%...I hope we are enticing you Edward...

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Richard Lee • 4 months ago

If my memory serves me right, an experiment to provide people with a guaranteed basic income was tried in Canada in the late 70's. All the information gathered about this was positive, however with the conservative shift in philosophy it was stopped. It was a much more efficient and cost effective means of helping the poor, and actually increased productivity and societal interaction. It makes sense--if basic needs (housing, food and utilities) are covered, people have more time to invest in community and innovation and not just basic survival.

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amyinnh > Richard Lee • 3 months ago

We call it minimum wage. And it's been allowed to erode, along with employment stability. And so in response, the cities have started to create "transitional" housing, but I don't know if it's keeping up with demand.

I expect real estate to suffer, as paychecks diminish. The national real estate PAC is putting heavy money in Washington to ramp up immigration, to try infusing vigor. But influx of immigrants + diminishing wages + existing labor glut merely causes compaction into fewer housing units, as is notable by young adults saying at home with parents, a trend starting years ago in Japan and now the case here also.

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Richard Lee > amyinnh • 3 months ago

Although you were certainly busy with the comments 3 days ago, you certainly did not research the issue at hand. A guaranteed basic income is different than minimum wage guidelines that were established. Your response shows that, and the additional comments that were added merely confuses and does not clarify the issue. Please respond to the comment and not the fantasy you've created for yourself.

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amyinnh > Richard Lee • 3 months ago

Possibly you don't understand that in the US, the "guaranteed basic income", is called minimum wage. And there is no "invest in community and innovation" roots in the US, beyond any that provides profit. The last instantiation that comes anywhere near that was Henry Ford, and his "innovation" on "investment" was solely to fiscally bulk up the consumer market for his own goods. As the years go by, there's less and less innovation investment, beyond getting more profit from producing the same.

Your proposal, for the US, is beyond fantasy. There is no shred of root in US history. I can only guess you must be proposing it for some other country.

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Jeff A. Taylor • 4 months ago

More convinced than ever that the kind of political reform Snowden thinks might be possible starts with Congressional candidates pledging to impeach federal judges who violate their oaths. I'd start with FISC judges. Impeachment was intended to be a legislative check on the judiciary, but we've reached the point where the legal cartel operates with such impunity that we cannot even quickly

and clearly impeded a federal judge who searched the wire around an Atlanta hotel room a couple months ago.

4 • Reply • Share ›



amyinnh > Jeff A. Taylor • 3 months ago

With the R and D parties bought and paid for, don't expect any candidate they produce to be public any better than what's there now. There needs to be significant number of voters willing to step outside the D/R box(es).

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perryfellwock • 4 months ago

NSA reform is distinctive in garnering strong support from both sides of the political spectrum since the brave action by Mr. Snowden in revealing the extent of modern NSA spying and subversion. In the House, the USA FREEDOM Act had 80 Democratic and 72 Republican cosponsors. In the Senate, the USA FREEDOM Act has the unique honor of having Bernie Sanders and Ted Cruz as co-sponsors.

This consensus is not just among politicians of different stripes. Groups across the ideological spectrum — ranging from the ALCU and EFF to FreedomWorks and the NRA — all support the Senate version of the USA FREEDOM Act. These and many other groups are joined by America's biggest tech companies. Most recently, Attorney General Eric Holder and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper — a long-time defender of NSA surveillance — announced support for the bill and stated that prohibiting bulk collection would not weaken national security. At this point, it seems practically everyone except Congress has given the USA FREEDOM Act a stamp of approval.

The USA FREEDOM Act is the only current vehicle to achieving one of the goals for modern day freedom, respect for our privacy from bulk communications collection, espoused by Mr. Snowden and supported by so many of us.

Tell Congress to support the USA FREEDOM ACT. <http://act.freepress.net/sign/...>

3 • Reply • Share ›



fabian955 > perryfellwock • 4 months ago

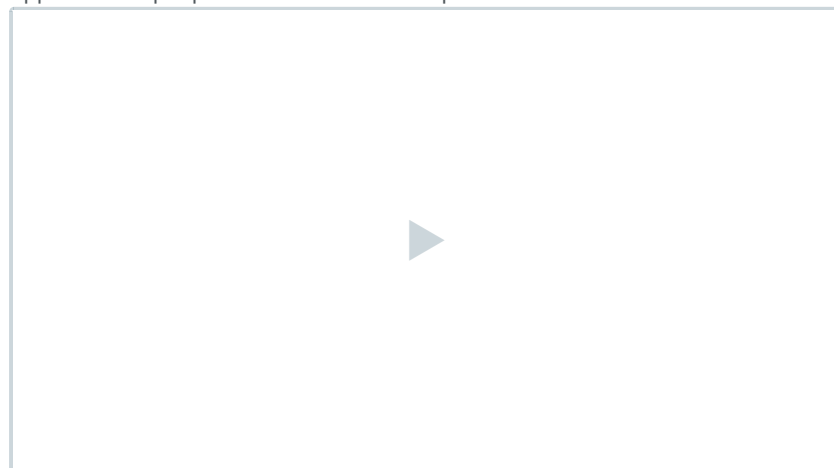
The right wing believes that the NSA protects them.

4 • Reply • Share ›



Иван • 4 months ago

Appeal to the people of the USA and Europe!



4 • Reply • Share ›



j99f > Иван • 4 months ago

As Snowden indicated, we need more people like you to speak out on issues that address inequalities in wealth and power. Once sufficient numbers are fully aware of the problems facing everyone action will follow.

Good video, keep up the effort, knowing that change will happen in our own lifetime.

4   • Reply • Share ›



Guest > Иван • 3 months ago

Yeah, Americans are killing Ukrainians and Russians are only good friends as always.....Nice piece of Putin propaganda

1   • Reply • Share ›



Blokus Block > Иван • 3 months ago

What a BS! Most of the people in Ukraine want out of Russian influence. Just like Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Moldova did.

Why Russia invaded Ukraine and annexed chunk of it? Did the US annexed part of Middle East too?

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Luba Petrusha > Иван • 4 months ago

9/11 Truther. Really? This is who we need to pay attention to?

  • Reply • Share ›



michaelscullen • 4 months ago

I too think that the interview performed a very valuable service, but in the end, I think WE THE PEOPLE are up the creek without a paddle. How to guarantee Snowden gets a fair trial, when we can't be sure that he even get a trial. Snowden needs habeas corpus, but who's to guarantee it if the the Dept of Justice suspended it in similar cases. Open trial? The DoJ will say that the secret stuff means that the trial will be behind closed doors? Who could guarantee that Snowden would even be left alone, that he would be safe? The guy I voted for twice for the WH has lost it, too bad, who's left? Perhaps Justices Kagan or Sotomayor. Somebody like that has to visit him where he is and also get a guarantee from the United Nations that Snowden will be allowed to await trial in a secluded space, with the best lawyers in America, and in front of a PERFECT court. Too bad the Queen couldn't be called in - the UK is almost as deeply in as the US. Maybe the members of the Nobel Committee. My America doesn't have more than a handful of persons we could possibly trust to tell the truth (i.e.: cover up on Ebola, on NSA, on almost everything). In the end, therefore, the interview creates depression. As I said, up the creek without a paddle.

Over to you, KvandenHeuvel

2   • Reply • Share ›



amyinnh > michaelscullen • 3 months ago

A ship this size doesn't change direction overnight. An apple seed doesn't produce a tree in a year. No need to get depressed. Patience!

  • Reply • Share ›



Angelika Kunze • 4 months ago

Support Snowden and stop NSA from stealing your personal data!

<http://bit.ly/1vP0rwd>

2   • Reply • Share ›



Catine • 4 months ago

How extraordinary by two most highly creative people. This is truly amazingly clear and truthful. Thank you.

2   • Reply • Share ›



fabian955 • 4 months ago

In the US, Occupy was successfully reframed, bastardized. What began as an extraordinary people's movement was quickly redefined, mainly by lib media, as a movement of the middle class alone, the better off. (By definition, if you're still in the middle class, you're doing great! Much of the country isn't.) We still hear of a protest here and there that is lumped under the Occupy banner, but any

chance of an actual movement was wiped out when Occupy became a bourgeois event (or talking point). "Stand in Solidarity to protect the status quo of the better off!" Right.

2 • Reply • Share ›



Joan Z. Shore > [fabian955](#) • 4 months ago

No, Occupy did not become "a bourgeois event". (Perhaps it should have.) It was damned and ridiculed as a hippy event, composed of losers, drop-outs, and druggies. As it started to look more serious, the police moved in.

If the media had taken it more seriously and honestly, it might have grown and had some impact.

Bravo for Edward Snowden...."spaseba"!

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