

Washington Post takes heat for Snowden prosecution call

September 21 2016

A Washington Post editorial arguing for the prosecution of intelligence leaker Edward Snowden has sparked an outcry in the media community—including from some of the newspaper's own journalists.

The weekend editorial provoked a heated response, with some pointing out the irony that the newspaper was calling for criminal charges against a source who helped it win a 2014 Pulitzer Prize for public service reporting.

The editorial board "has no say on news, and just showed why," said a tweet from Barton Gellman, the Post reporter who led the team that shared the Pulitzer with The Guardian for the reporting on global surveillance based on Snowden's leaks of National Security Agency documents.

Gellman added that Snowden's "disclosures served the public. WP journalists are proud of our role."

Jane Kirtley, a professor of media ethics and law at the University of Minnesota, said the Post's editorial view comes as a shock to the media community even if there is a separation of the opinion and reporting units.

"It does seem to me that any news organization that is going to rely on a source and potentially imperil that source, really needs to stand by that source," Kirtley told AFP.

"I personally think Snowden should come back and face charges, but I didn't take Snowden's leaks and put them all over my newspaper."

Kirtley noted that prosecuting sources for leaks should be troubling for the world of journalism.

"It is my belief that going after sources for leaks using the Espionage Act is a prelude to going after the journalists who receive that information," she said. "It hasn't happened yet, but it is possible."

Washington Post media columnist Margaret Sullivan also broke with the [editorial board](#), calling for Snowden to be pardoned.

"Snowden did an important—and brave—service for the American public," Sullivan wrote in a column Tuesday.

"Without his decision to bring the information to journalists, it is very unlikely that we would know what we do about mass surveillance in the post-9/11 world."

'Ignominious feat'

A more blunt response came from Glenn Greenwald, a member of the Guardian team that met with Snowden and now an editor at the online news site The Intercept.

"The Washington Post has achieved an ignominious feat in US media history: the first-ever paper to explicitly editorialize for the criminal prosecution of its own source—one on whose back the paper won and eagerly accepted a Pulitzer Prize for Public Service," Greenwald wrote.

The debate comes amid increasing calls for a pardon for Snowden, who has been living in Moscow out of the reach of US law enforcement.

The Post editorial argued that not only should Snowden not be pardoned, but that he should return to face charges and argue his defense "before a jury of his peers."

The editorial acknowledged that Snowden justifiably exposed violations of law by the National Security Agency which helped lead to reforms.

But it added that Snowden also "leaked details of basically defensible international intelligence operations" and "disrupted lawful intelligence-gathering, causing possibly 'tremendous damage' to national security."

But Fortune magazine media writer Matthew Ingram said it was troubling to see the comments from the Post, which has a tradition of investigative journalism which dates back to leaks in the Watergate scandal and Pentagon Papers case.

"Attacking and undermining the source that helped the company win a Pulitzer Prize looks hypocritical at best and craven at worst, and is almost certain to make future Snowdens think twice or even three times about going to the newspaper with a leak or a classified tip," Ingram wrote.

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Citation: Washington Post takes heat for Snowden prosecution call (2016, September 21)
retrieved 2 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2016-09-washington-snowden-prosecution.html>

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