

The Snowden Paradox

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Edward Snowden, the ideological warrior for freedom of information, is requesting that Russia grant him political asylum from the dictatorial U.S. regime that eavesdrops on its citizens.

A trial against opposition leader Alexei Navalny is now under way in Kirov. Part of the evidence used against him includes wiretapped phone conversations. They were tapped without a court order even before he became a prominent opposition member. Strangely enough, the Federal Security Service has no qualms about letting the world know that it

eavesdrops on everybody.

Another trial is currently in progress in Yekaterinburg against Aksana Panova, the former owner of Ura.ru, the largest news agency in the Urals.

In this case, the role of wiretapping is even larger. Panova, an influential journalist and attractive woman, rejected the advances of Sverdlovsk region Governor Yevgeny Kuivashev in favor of the charismatic opposition activist Yevgeny Roizman. Not only is there reason to believe that the governor listened to all of Panova's phone conversations with Roizman, but charges were filed against her almost immediately after mention was made over the phone that she was pregnant.

What's more, Panova, whom officials questioned several times a day, ended up having a miscarriage. And just 30 minutes after she had communicated that information by phone, Panova herself received a call from someone asking, "Is it true?"

While authorities were preparing the lawsuit against Panova, a killer was arrested in Yekaterinburg, and officers found phone bills and other materials in his home indicating that he had been spying on Panova and Roizman.

There is nothing surprising about this, however. During the investigation into the murder of former Novaya Gazeta journalist Anna Politkovskaya, it became known that police surveillance units earned money on the side by helping hired assassins. Police officers tailed the future victims while on duty and driving official vehicles, then passed the information on to the killers. In one case, the murderer actually began shooting at his victim while seated in a police car.

And now we have Edward Snowden seeking asylum in Russia, a country where a woman's rejected lover eavesdrops on the conversations of his rival, where the police earn extra money by providing surveillance information to hired assassins, where the FSB posts illegally obtained wiretapping transcripts on the Internet, and where the police eavesdrop on the conversations of businesspeople and then use that information to extort money or even seize the entire business.

If the infantile Snowden really wanted to be a hero, he would return to the U.S., where at the most he would probably get a 10-year sentence and be out on parole in five. But Snowden wanted to become a digital-age Jesus Christ without being crucified. Now he faces the prospect of spending not five years in confinement, but a lifetime as a "guest" under the strict control of the FSB. This is the type of total control where the FSB tells Snowden "Sit here!" or "Appear at that news conference!" and he has no other choice but comply. If he gets asylum here, Snowden will have to make all sorts of ridiculous statements to the media and set up more meetings with Kremlin-friendly, pseudo-human rights activists.

President Vladimir Putin has inadvertently given the U.S. the perfect gift. By discrediting Snowden in the eyes of the world, Putin has shown how the hacker who dreamed of earning accolades as a whistleblower really behaves — not when he is threatened by the U.S., but when things really get scary under the total control of the FSB.

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