

## **Julian Assange's Acceptance Speech of the**

### **Sydney Peace Foundation Gold Medal**

**10 May, Frontline Club, London**

Thank you Professor Rees and Mary Kostakidis. I think Professor Rees has stolen all my good lines and Mary's stolen all my jokes, so I'm not sure that I have much left. However, I would like to begin first of all with a status update because there has been a change since December last year and the present moment, and it is as a result of our very strong supporters, many of you are in this the audience at the moment, others are sitting on the two chairs here and many other people in countries across the world that have kept us safe.

The change in position can be understood by looking at what the Australian government was doing last year. The Australian government under the surface had been involved in giving information and speaking to intelligence agencies from other countries about us, but it engaged in a public attack by setting up what it called a whole of government enquiry into us; publicly stating that it involved ASIO (the domestic intelligence service), ASIS (the foreign intelligence service), the Department of Defence, the AFP (the equivalent of the FBI in Australia) and the Australian Attorney General's Department.

The Australian Attorney General Robert McCallum said that we could not, and I could not, from the safety of my office publish and he would assist any country anywhere in the world to prosecute me. He also stated that as an Australian travelling overseas they would attempt to revoke my passport and two weeks later decided not to revoke my passport, using the statement that the Australian government and its partners found it helpful for tracking my movements.

This year the Australian government has found that we breached no Australian laws in any of our activities. The public enquiry by the domestic intelligence service ASIO has stopped, the foreign enquiry by ASIS has stopped, the Australian Federal Police enquiry (which the Attorney General had said might take up to 18 months) has stopped. It has been wound up and found that we had engaged in no crimes. That is not due to the good sense of the Australian Labor Government, it is not due to the good sense of the people it was working with in Washington; it is entirely due to the Australian people and the people who fight for us. I would like to draw people's attention to that and have you understand that your actions have made a difference.

But there are enquiries that have not stopped and not been wound up. The CIA publicly declared a WikiLeaks Task Force. The Pentagon publicly declared a 120-man operation into us working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When it was revealed that the CIA had its own special dedicated Task Force the reaction of the majority of the press was not to go ‘is this acceptable that there is a publicly declared CIA Task Force into a publishing organization?’ Rather the media as a whole was very effectively spun. The name of the Task Force: WikiLeaks Task Force was WTF: “What The Fuck”, and of course everyone went: ‘oh what a joke. What a joke, the Task Force is WTF isn’t that funny?’ No it’s not funny that there is a dedicated CIA Task Force into our organization. That is not funny, that is serious. It is not funny when the CIA received a Freedom of Information Act request asking about whether the CIA has any information about plots or plans to assassinate me and refused to confirm or deny whether it did or did not. That is not funny, that is very serious. And it is not just serious for me it is serious for our staff, our volunteers and our sources. It is serious for those people being called to the secret Grand Jury investigation in Alexandria, Virginia on Wednesday. Called to testify in secret to try and establish an espionage connection between me and our volunteers and the young military intelligence soldier Bradley Manning.

The real value of this award and the Sydney Peace Foundation is that it makes explicit the link between Peace and Justice. It does not take the safe, feel-good option of shunning controversy by uttering platitudes. Instead, it goes into difficult terrain by identifying organizations or individuals who are directly engaged in struggles of one kind or another. With WikiLeaks, there is no doubt that we are all engaged in a struggle – a generational struggle for a proposition that is no more radical than that the citizens have a right, indeed a duty to scrutinize the state and to scrutinize states.

I always keep in mind something that was said by the great poet and novelist May Sarton: you have to think like a hero in order to act like a merely decent human being. And there is a wonderful scene in *The Russia House*, a movie based on John le Carre’s novel, where a whistleblower pleads with a potential publisher – “promise me that if I ever find the courage to think like a hero, then you will act like a merely decent human being.” And that has always been our promise to whistle-blowers and sources: that if you have the courage to act like a hero, then we will act like merely decent human beings as publishers.

And that is why we have never unpublished anything that we have published, no matter what kind of threats have been leveled against us we have never yielded to attacks on history that our sources have helped us make. That is your common intellectual record and it must remain sacrosanct. We keep the faith with our sources, whose anonymity and courage always humble us.

We are objective but we are not neutral. We are on the side of justice. Objectivity is not the same as neutrality. We are objective about the facts when it comes to reporting and not distorting facts. But we are not neutral about what kind of world we would like to see. We want to see a more just

world. This means giving people access to the information that is the power behind justice. Without this free flow of information, an organized minority will always dominate a disorganized majority. That means that most people cannot participate in power, and until people participate in power, we will not have a just world.

These ideas are not new this basic notion really stems back to Madison who said that if a people mean to be their own rulers and given that knowledge will always rule ignorance that people must have the power that knowledge will bring.

In 2006 in a letter to our people I wrote: "Every time we witness an injustice and do not act, we train our character to be passive in its presence and thereby lose all ability to defend ourselves and those we love. In a modern economy it is impossible to seal oneself off from injustice...If we can only live once, then let it be a daring adventure that draws on all our powers... Men in their prime, if they have convictions, are tasked to act on them."

Our work at WikiLeaks has surprised many people, including some journalists, who have reacted with hostility to us and I would argue in a hostile manner to the basic ethics of journalism. which is to hold power to account. We come from a long line of free-speech traditions. These go back in the UK to the time of the Civil War of the 1640s. I pointed out in the New Statesman recently, guest-edited by Jemima Goldsmith, that a man named Clement Walker wrote about how the press at the time of those struggles was rousing the population into action. He wrote:

"They have cast all the Mysteries and secrets of Government, both by Kings and parliaments, before the vulgar (like Pearl before Swine), and have taught both the Soldiery and People to look so far into them as to ravel back all Governments, to the first principles of nature... They have made the People thereby so curious and arrogant that they will never find humility enough to submit to a civil rule."

He was right, of course.

And John Pilger who I see has just joined us put it right when he said in Sydney that it is not WikiLeaks the United States government is afraid of, it is not Julian Assange that they are afraid of. What does it matter what I know, what does it matter what WikiLeaks' knows? It matters not at all. What matters is what you know. And these organizations are scared of what you know and they are scared of what the general population knows and they want to put a stop to us because they want to put a stop to you knowing.

And the great Australian historian, Humphrey McQueen, said in a rally in Canberra defending me and WikiLeaks that a free press was won by London radical printers, such as Richard Carlile, who, along with more than a hundred tradesman and others, went to prison for a total of 200 years

between them. The rights that we know take for granted were all won by a struggle. The tally would have been greater had London juries not often refused to convict, so our free speech rights are also a product of the jury system. Something that is absent, you may note, in extradition cases. And the governors in New South Wales and Tasmania had a long history of imprisoning newspaper editors. Once again those editors continue to publish even though they were continued to be imprisoned and we might ask where are the newspaper editors today who will risk being imprisoned for their craft. These radical publishers and activists took matters into their own hands by embodying the freedoms they wished to see. They did not suffer, as Rudolf Rocker says, the ruinous delusion that salvation will come from above. That's what we hope to change – to give people everywhere who have information from below the tools and the knowledge to change their world.

The democratic implications of the material released by WikiLeaks are only just beginning to be seen. People everywhere are clamoring for materials relevant to their cause or country. Initially we partnered, for reasons of Realpolitik, with a small number of very large media organizations. But since then we have been working alongside a much larger range of media organizations and nonprofit groups from Global Witness to Amnesty to small groups working in Latin America, giving them access to hundreds – or, in some cases, thousands – of cables relevant to their regions or causes. We now have 73 partners from El Salvador to Lebanon publishing in their own language exposing the corrupt in their own countries and without.

I and my staff are very grateful to the Sydney Peace Foundation for honoring us with the Gold Medal for Peace with Justice not because it is merely an accolade but because it is a certification to attract the support of people like those in this room, who are committed to bringing Peace with Justice. In the same way, we believe it is a certification to bring the hostility of people who are opposed to Peace with Justice; it is a sign that we are doing what journalists ought to be doing every day – afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, as the Chicago writer Finley Peter Dunne, once put it. And the comfortable have certainly been afflicted. There are those Task Forces that I spoke of and illegal calls for me to be arrested or assassinated as a terrorist. But to terrorize politicians is not to be a terrorist. Governments that have no intention of applying the precautionary principle when it comes to protecting the environment assert it when it comes to our activities reporting. They conjure up hypothetical scenarios and claim that our stories may someday harm someone somewhere. Yet they have provided no evidence over four years of any actual harm.

For my staff and me, WikiLeaks will always strive to be an intelligence agency of the people. And we will always – as long as whistle-blowers are willing to act as heroes – act like merely decent human beings.

Thank you.

