

# Requiem for the Fourth Estate

The arrest of Julian Assange adds to the steady erosion of the rights we once took for granted, says Ray McGovern.

**By Ray McGovern**

It is a very sad day for the rule of law.

Today's broad-daylight manhandling and kidnapping of Julian Assange from political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London demonstrates in bas-relief that in today's Anglo-America, the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights are now "quaint and obsolete," to use the words of pseudo-lawyer, Alberto Gonzales.

White House attorney Gonzales was referring in January 2002 to other basic principles of international law, the Geneva Conventions, from which he decided he could grant Bush an exemption so he could authorize torture – which he did on February 7, 2002. (We have that memo.)

This no secret; we also have the Gonzales's memo to Bush. For services performed, Gonzales was nominated and confirmed as Attorney General, the chief U.S. law enforcer.

When WikiLeaks revealed U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Sam Adams Associates for Integrity chose Julian Assange for its annual integrity award. The award's "Oscar," a corner-brightener candlestick holder for shining light into dark places, was presented to Mr. Assange by UK Ambassador Craig Murray and Daniel Ellsberg after a major press conference in London on October 23, 2010. Julian Assange became the eighth in what has become an distinguished line of sixteen truth-tellers – awardees of the

Sam Adams Associates.

The citation reads as follows:

*Sam Adams Associates for Integrity*

### **Julian Assange**

It seems altogether fitting and proper that this year's award be presented in London, where Edmund Burke coined the expression "Fourth Estate." Comparing the function of the press to that of the three Houses then in Parliament, Burke said:

"...but in the Reporters Gallery yonder, there sits a Fourth Estate more important far then they all."

The year was 1787—the year the U.S. Constitution was adopted. The First Amendment, approved four years later, aimed at ensuring that the press would be free of government interference. That was then.

With the Fourth Estate now on life support, there is a high premium on the fledgling Fifth Estate, which uses the ether and is not susceptible of government or corporation control. Small wonder that governments with lots to hide feel very threatened.

It has been said: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." WikiLeaks is helping make that possible by publishing documents that do not lie.

Last spring, when we chose WikiLeaks and Julian Assange for this award, Julian said he would accept only "on behalf of our sources, without which WikiLeaks' contributions are of no significance."

We do not know if Pvt. Bradley Manning gave WikiLeaks the gun-barrel video of July 12, 2007 called "Collateral Murder." Whoever did provide that graphic footage, showing the brutality of the celebrated "surge" in Iraq, was certainly far more a patriot than the "mainstream" journalist embedded in that same Army unit. He suppressed what happened in Baghdad that day, dismissed it as simply "one bad day in a surge that was filled with such days," and then had the temerity to lavish praise on the unit in a book he called "The Good Soldiers."

Julian is right to emphasize that the world is deeply indebted to patriotic truth-tellers like the sources who provided the gun-barrel footage and the many documents on Afghanistan and Iraq to WikiLeaks. We hope to have a chance to honor them in person in the future.

Today we honor WikiLeaks, and one of its leaders, Julian Assange, for their ingenuity in creating a new highway by which important documentary evidence can make its way, quickly and confidentially, through the ether and into our in-boxes. Long live the Fifth Estate!

*Presented this 23rd day of October 2010 in London, England by admirers of the example set by former CIA analyst, Sam Adams.*

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