

The Last Whistleblowers

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In-depth Report: [OCCUPY WALL STREET](#)

Whistleblowing in our federal government may soon be a thing of the past, not because whistleblowers face more vicious retribution than ever before — although that is true; and not because important acts of whistleblowing now result in fewer reforms and less accountability than they used to — although that is also true and is getting closer; but fundamentally because the actions against which we need whistles blown are publicly acknowledged.

How would one expose war or indefinite imprisonment or assassinations or drone attacks or wiretapping or profiteering or bribery or massive money transfers to Wall Street? I understand how, even a few years ago, such things could be exposed by courageous whistleblowers. I understand how retired officials who missed their chance at being timely whistleblowers can now expose the steps through which these crimes have been normalized. But I have a hard time understanding how one would leak to the media or reveal on one's blog what has been openly acknowledged, legalized, formalized, and normalized.

Starting from the model of whistleblowers, one is tempted to suggest that we begin supporting those individuals who will resist immoral orders and assignments: resisters instead of whistleblowers. But we have one whistleblower for every 100,000 or so government employees informed of the abuses exposed. We are likely to have infinitely fewer inside resisters. Clearly we need a different model. We need to all be whistleblowers, since we all know about the crimes. We need to insist on viewing policies differently, rather than viewing different policies. We need to expose what happens where the bombs land and the defunding of human needs hit home. And we need to organize massive resistance from outside the government, with the potential for creating massive resistance within the government as well.

I expressed my concerns and raised these questions to some of our most praiseworthy whistleblowers at an event Monday evening in Washington, D.C.

Jesselyn Radack [exposed](#) the illegal treatment of the “American Taliban.” Thomas Drake [exposed](#) crimes and abuses, including warrantless spying, by the NSA, as well as the NSA's pre-9-11 possession of information that could have prevented 9-11. Coleen Rowley [revealed](#) that the FBI, too, had possessed information that could have prevented 9-11. These whistleblowers were joined on Monday by Ray McGovern, Larry Wilkerson, and Peter Kuznick. I raised the above concerns to all of them.

The only answer they came up with in response to my question was the same answer everyone comes up with for everything these days, and — I think — the right answer:

Participate in the Occupy movement.

Monday's event was an annual presentation of Sam Adams Awards, in this case to Drake and Radack. Previous awards have gone to Rowley, Wilkerson, Katharine Gun, Sibel Edmonds, Craig Murray, Sam Provance, Frank Grevil, and Julian Assange. The award is named for the Sam Adams who in 1967 discovered that there were over 500,000 Vietnamese Communists under arms, over twice the number the Pentagon would admit to. Dan Ellsberg leaked the story to the press in 1968. Six days after the story ran, President Johnson complained bitterly about it. Six more days later he paused the bombing, opted for negotiations, and announced that he would not run for reelection.

Rowley, who was a Time Magazine person of the year in 2002 along with a woman from Enron and a woman from WorldCom, both of them whistleblowers, said that since that time we have not had any more major prosecutions for corruption. Rowley said that her banner at [Freedom Plaza](#) on Monday had read "Prosecute Corruption!"

TheRealNews.com will be posing video of Monday's event.

Radack told her [familiar story](#). She described Drake's case as similar to hers, but worse in that he was indicted under the WWI-era Espionage Act, a law meant to go after spies, not whistleblowers or "leakers." Obama has prosecuted more people under that act than all previous administrations combined, Radack pointed out.

Drake thanked Radack for her help on his case, crediting her work for his legal victory and his freedom. Drake said a vicious campaign against whistleblowers has come to full fruition under Obama. Whistleblowers under Bush and Obama, he said, have lost their jobs and been made unemployable. Drake lost his security clearance. Radack lost her law license and was placed on a No Fly List. "We are moving into tyranny and despotism," Drake said in a passionate speech from prepared text. "I fear for the republic," he said. "Today we have a frightening lack of accountability within the national security complex and it poses a direct threat to our personal freedoms and to our constitutional republic. Both cannot coexist. Our government has lost its constitutional compass; it has been tainted to its core. Yet it is our enshrined liberties that are our national security."

Drake said the government had threatened him with "35 years in prison for simply telling the truth." "The government," he said, "found out everything they could about me over many years before I was ever indicted and turned me into an enemy of the state." And for nothing. "There was no need to go to the dark side," Drake said.

Wilkerson agreed. Wilkerson said that he'd be in jail or dead right now if the people who would do that to him didn't fear Colin Powell who knows where all the skeletons are hidden. This occurred to him, Wilkerson said, while he was listening to Drake.

In the very next breath, Wilkerson said that Powell is writing a book that will cover his UN speech and that Wilkerson himself is writing a book that will also cover that speech. He'll want to check Powell's facts, Wilkerson said. (How closely, given his analysis of what's keeping him alive?) He also said that he did not even belong on the same stage with Radack and Drake — which circles back to what I thought Wilkerson was going to say kept him out of jail and the grave, namely his failure to blow the whistle in a more timely manner.

What stands out about every person who was part of Monday's panel is how incredibly rare they are. What ought to go without saying, what would simply be required of students for example under the University of Virginia's honor system, is an extremely unusual freak occurrence in our government in Washington, D.C. We do indeed need to reward such rare courage and sacrifice when decency and integrity are in such short supply and a culture of fear, loyalty, and conformism is ascendant in the halls of power and bureaucracy. We are going to need to develop a counter culture, the culture one can see blossoming in the Occupy encampments, a culture in which honesty and integrity are the norm, a culture in which decent behavior leads to acceptance rather than ostracism. Sam Adams Award recipients can help show us the way.

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