

Why The 'Journalists' Don't Like Julian Assange

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The death of real journalism, a sad and sorry tale. Voltaire, Victor Hugo and Thomas Paine would be turning in their graves.

Why is it that so many journalists have turned their backs on Julian Assange? Why do so many abuse him instead of defending him? He is, after all, a world historic figure who will be remembered centuries from now in the same way we remember Voltaire, Victor Hugo and Thomas Paine. Thanks to technology, Assange has been able to do far more than they could ever imagine in advancing the 'right to know' component of human rights. He has broken more real news than all the journalists who sneer at him put together, so resentment could be one explanation. They say Assange is 'not a journalist' when what they mean is that he is not a journalist *like them*.

The keywords here are mediation and control. 'What lies behind the headlines' has another meaning beyond what is really going on in politics. 'What lies behind the headlines' is also what goes on in newsrooms before you read your morning paper or watch the evening news bulletin.

News is a product, like anything that comes off the factory floor. The raw material comes in, is processed, refined and polished before being placed on the sales shelf called 'news.' Millions of pieces of news flow into editorial rooms every day. What you read or watch is only the tiniest fraction of this flood.

What you read or see is what someone is choosing for you, what someone thinks is 'news' compared to all the other items that never see the light of day, what someone thinks you *should* know as opposed to what you might *like* to know.

News in the mainstream is mediated from start to finish. The reporter produces the raw product. Whether it is a car crash or civil war, someone else will always see it differently but his or her particular version is the raw material submitted for processing. Editors at the daily news conference decide if it deserves a place and where it should be placed, on page one, three or five, at the top of the page or lower down, under a one column or three column heading, at the top of the nightly news bulletin or closer to the bottom.

The editor has the final say. He or she is the link between the board and the advertisers and has to deal with the pressure that might come from their direction when the story is a sensitive one. Thus, depending on the relationship between editor and the board/proprietor, an important story might not be published at all or might be shriveled to the point where it no longer seems important.

The decision made, an editor gets to work, cutting, reshaping, honing and polishing the story, maybe moving paragraphs around if he or she thinks they are not in the right order,

until the product is ready to attract the attention of the reader/viewer, much as the male jackdaw lines the nest with silver paper to attract the attention of the female. There can be differences of opinion between the reporter and the editor along the way but in essence they are egotistical, not over truth or untruth or the public's right to know, but over how the story should be written and presented.

There is no unmediated news in the mainstream media. It is the news as decided by reporters and editors, from the choice of story to report in the first place to the end of the production line. There could be thousands of other news items you the reader or viewer might think are worthier of space and time that never see the light of day.

What is happening around the world, therefore, is only what is *reported* as happening, before being processed to meet editorial requirements. If it is not reported it might as well not have happened, beyond the impact within the immediate circle of where it did happen. Thus the media can make something happen or unhappen, according to the choices made in editorial rooms.

Control relates to control as exerted vertically, from the board or proprietor down to the editor and then to the very bottom of the editorial chain. Apart from the car crash, the rape or the robbery, there is a line that has to be protected when it comes to important political stories or stories that affect advertisers and the particular media outlet's commercial interests. There is always some flexibility, depending on how tightly controlled the editorial line is from the top, but the general political/social profile of the organization always has to be protected.

If 'news' is to be defined as something we don't know, we could spend our entire lives reading books (and might be better off for it). Much of the 'news' that is printed falls into the same category of what we don't know but whether we really *need* or *want* to know it is another question.

The endless goings-on of the Kardashian family might be a good example. The definition of news has swung in the direction of 'celebrity gossip' and the celebrities have responded by providing editors with all the 'news' they might want to print, but 'news' that many of 'us' (readers and viewers) would regard as trash. Of course, for the media to remain viable, the product has to sell and amidst all the Kardashian bottoms, that is the bottom line.

So mediation and control are two reasons the journalists abuse Assange. Given the massive volume of material Wikipedia receives, he or his team have to exert some control and make decisions about how much they can upload within their technical capacity but what they do post is unmediated. There are no cuts, no editing no polishing: the news comes to you in its raw state and you the reader can decide what to make of it, instead of someone *telling* you what to make of it.

Another reason for disliking Assange is jealousy. He has scooped all of these journalists who abuse him thousand times over, by releasing sensational material that exposes the dirty secrets they would love to get their hands on.

In recent history only one reporter, Seymour Hersh, without the technical ability to penetrate government vaults that Wikipedia's sources have and relying entirely on his human sources, has come anywhere close to what Assange has achieved. Hersh is the greatest

reporter of this age, or just about any age, a model of courage and the determination to dig for the truth, whatever the obstacles.

His fate is instructive. He broke the My Lai massacre in 1968, he exposed the Abu Ghraib prison torture in 2004 and he broke many other stories in between, yet when he crossed the government-media line on Syria by exposing the falsity of the claim that the Syrian government was responsible for an alleged chemical weapons attack close to Damascus in 2013 his usual outlet, the *New Yorker*, refused to publish. The story was handed to the *Washington Post*, which also turned it down. The arguments that it did not meet their standards don't deserve to be taken seriously.

Eventually, the *London Review of Books* took the story on but when Hersh followed up with an account questioning the trans-Atlantic government and media line on the alleged role of the Syrian government in the alleged chemical weapons attack at Khan Sheikhun in April, 2017, the *LRB* declined to publish even though it had paid for the story.

Subsequently, Hersh had to publish in Germany ('Khan Sheikhun Trump's Red Line,' *Welt am Sonntag*, June 25, 2017) and he now has no place anywhere in the mainstream print media of his own country.

Another reason for journalists disliking Assange is that in one way or another, they are not free to write what they want. They belong to institutions, 'belonging' defined as owned by them. They depend on them for their salaries and their careers. Basically they are correct when they say 'No-one tells me what to write.' No one *has* to tell them because they already know what to write if they want to keep their jobs, wherever they happen to work.

Self-censorship is central to the practice of journalism in the mainstream. No-one with an eye on their best interests is going to write something they know editors will throw in their face, not because it is badly written but because it goes against the editorial line. They might be lucky enough to agree with the editorial line anyway but if they don't they have to adjust, or look for a future in journalism elsewhere.

Thus, journalists have power, the power and the money of the institution behind them. Assange has no institution behind him. Indeed, the institutions are all against him. A media which used him up has abandoned him. The government of his own country, Australia, has not lifted a finger in his defense.

What Assange does have behind him is the power of the truth-telling that should be the core of journalism, not the truth-tailoring and the acceptance of downright lies that characterizes much of mainstream journalism today. So of course the journalists don't like him, or should we say 'journalists', because who is doing the real work of journalism today, they or Julian Assange?