

## Whistleblowing [1]

*"My sole motive is to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them." - Edward Snowden [2]*

If this decade's politics has been dominated by anything it is the whistleblower. October 2010 saw the largest classified military leak in history by [Wikileaks](#) [3]- the [Iraq war logs](#) [4]. In so many ways this has set the tone for what has followed, whether it is here in the UK with the NHS or on the world stage with the Edward Snowden revelations. Names like Snowden and Manning now household names. But equally people who aren't so famous do us a service speaking up in defence of others, in every part of our society. Thanks to them, we know about neglect in care homes, fraud in charities, sexual abuse, asbestos workers exposed to harm.

### What is whistleblowing

*The Whistleblowing [Charity Public Concern](#) [5] at Work puts it like this: "Someone blows the whistle when they tell their employer, a regulator, customers, the police or the media about wrongdoing, risk or malpractice that they are aware of through their work. ... He or she is a messenger raising a concern so that others can address it."*

There has been a lot of negative comment about whistleblowers because of high profile cases. But surely no one can object to people exposing wrongdoing or harm. The law recognises the positive role whistleblowers play - the [Public Interest Disclosure Act](#) [6] is precisely that, in the public interest. It protects employees who reveal certain types of information including evidence of illegal activity or damage to the environment.

But we don't think the law goes far enough to protect the right to speak up by a long way.

### MidStaffordshire



There this new focus on a duty of openness in the NHS - which absolutely relies on individuals to blow the whistle. This is largely because of the [Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust scandal](#) [7] coming to light. Some 1,200, patients died at Stafford Hospital between 2005 and 2009 after

suffering neglect and shoddy care.

This situation was compounded when Stafford A&E doctors treated a 20 year old in 2006 they failed to detect that he had a ruptured spleen, and he died. The trust commissioned a report to find out what went wrong, it concluded his death was avoidable. But instead of passing a copy to his parents and the coroner, they kept it secret, obstructing justice in the process. It is this deadly secrecy that whistleblowers are there to pierce.

In the case of Stafford hospital it was Julie Bailey who dared to speak out after her mother died there in 2007 after suffering poor care. Her action was vindicated by the Francis Inquiry which found that the hospital's management did little to deal with failings, while staff were lacking in compassion. [But Bailey paid dear for speaking up](#) [8]. She reported: "I was getting cards saying 'I hope you die in an ambulance on the way to hospital now you have closed this one...' " She finally had to move after her mother's grave was vandalised. This shows why whistleblowers need our support and protection.

## Edward Snowden



Sometimes hard choices need to be made to expose malpractice, wrongdoing and harm. Shouldn't the law always come first? Don't some parts of the State deserve special protection? Shouldn't the work of the secret services always be secret? This was the dilemma that Edward Snowden faced finding out about the biggest state surveillance system the world has ever seen. Thanks to him we now know email, chat, videos, photos, file transfers, social media, VOIP, logins, videoconferencing are all being blanket surveilled. This was entirely without public knowledge or consent.

You can read more about this in our [mass surveillance campaign](#) [9]. That there was a programme called "Mastering the Internet" for heaven's sake, shows the intent. Throughout there have been accusations that Snowden has put operatives at risk. There is zero evidence of this. No individual operations have been revealed. The heart of what whistleblowing is about is challenging the abuse of power. Particularly when it comes to the security services we rely on our elected representatives to have our - the public's - best interests at heart. We have to be able to trust them.

We now know we can not. The Liberal Democrats in this government told us we would not be subject to blanket surveillance by the so-called [Snooper's Charter](#) [10]. But it turns out we were misled. We have been subject to mass surveillance all along. Not only that but we were given the impression that we had a democratic choice over it. We did not. This is a fundamental attack on democracy and parliament.

If anything calls for speaking out it is this, even if it means putting yourself at odds with authority and the law. In the balance of harm vs illegality sometimes harm has to be the 1st consideration.

## Chelsea Manning



Chelsea [Manning](#) [11] knows this only too well. She was behind the releasing of the collateral murder video of the deaths of Reuters journalists, and the Afghan and Iraq war logs. She has paid with a [sentence of 35 years](#) [12]. Again she was challenging the abuse of power and blatant lies. We were told figures of civilian casualties were not kept. They were in sickening detail. We were told that cluster mines were banned from British soil, they were not.

But more than a legal or democratic challenge she saw a moral challenge. Her description of the Collateral murder video of soldiers picking off victims as “similar to a child torturing ants with a magnifying glass” makes the blood run cold. In the end it is a magnifying glass that whistleblowers like Manning take to us and our society, so we can see what we truly are.

Video of 5rXPrfnU3G0

## What needs to happen

- Protection and support for whistleblowers must be updated and strengthened.
- Whistleblowing protection needs to cover volunteers and the self employed.
- "Blacklisting" of workers who speak up and are politically active must stop.
- Employers, government and councils should be helped to develop whistleblowing policies to help people to speak out and protect them when they do.
- Laws to protect those who expose wrongdoing and corruption must take precedence over other types of law such as contract law and copyright.
- There should be recognition of fleeing from persecution for speaking out as a reason for asylum.

## What you can do

- Raise whistleblowing policy with your union and your workplace.
- If you are witness to harm or wrongdoing get advice and support about how to speak out - through an organisation like Public Concern At Work for example.

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### Links

[1] <http://legacy.pirateparty.org.uk/campaigns/issues/whistleblowing>

[2] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Snowden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Snowden)

[3] <https://wikileaks.org/>

[4] <http://www.theguardian.com/world/iraq-war-logs>

[5] <http://www.pcaw.org.uk/>

- [6] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\\_Interest\\_Disclosure\\_Act\\_1998](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_Interest_Disclosure_Act_1998)
- [7] <http://www.midstaffspublicinquiry.com/>
- [8] <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/oct/27/julie-bailey-mid-staffordshire-nhs-whistleblower>
- [9] <http://legacy.pirateparty.org.uk/campaigns/issues/mass-surveillance>
- [10] <http://legacy.pirateparty.org.uk/press/snoopers-charter-and-future-freedom>
- [11] <http://legacy.pirateparty.org.uk/press/manning-sentence-attack-whistleblowers>
- [12] <http://legacy.pirateparty.org.uk/russia-today-manning-sentencing>