

# Persecution of Whistleblowers Makes a Mockery of Magna Carta

Winston Churchill is remembered as Britain's defiant war leader. Few recall his later attempts to defend "the Great Charter" that is Magna Carta.

By [Shane Quinn](#)

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*Winston Churchill is perhaps the most famous British Prime Minister of all, remembered best for standing alone against the Nazis as they conquered swathes of Europe in 1940.*

Even Churchill's biggest detractors could not deny his courage in fighting against daunting odds. In July 1940, during "Britain's darkest hour", he urged his countrymen to "strive without failing in faith or in duty, and the dark curse of Hitler will be lifted from our age".

Churchill is widely respected in the English-speaking world, with past US President George W. Bush famously placing a bust of Britain's Prime Minister in the Oval Office. This despite Churchill having previously said,

"You can always count on the Americans to do the right thing, after they've tried everything else".



Winston Churchill

Yet few recall the former Conservative leader for what he later became in the post-World War II period – an outspoken defender of civil liberties and freedom of expression. Churchill repeatedly defended "the Great Charter", Magna Carta, as he reflected on the devastation wrought by two global conflicts, along with countless other wars.

In 1956, [Churchill said](#),

“Here is a law which is above the King and which even he must not break. This reaffirmation of a supreme law and its expression in a general charter is the great work of Magna Carta; and this alone justifies the respect in which men have held it”.

Considering the venerable bust, President Bush must have viewed Churchill with esteem, but was also seemingly unaware of the latter having said,

“The power of the executive to cast a man into prison without formulating any charge known to the law, and particularly to deny him the judgment of his peers, is in the highest degree odious”.

Bush violated these words with the practices he supported at Guantanamo Bay military prison, opened under his command in 2002.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the “supreme law” defended by Churchill has indeed been torn to pieces. And yet, perhaps this degradation is not altogether surprising. In 2012 during a television interview, the subject of Magna Carta was raised with Britain’s then Prime Minister David Cameron, by his American host David Letterman.

As the TV cameras rolled, Cameron [did not know](#) what the Latin title “Magna Carta” (Great Charter) translated to in English. When further pressed the British leader could not even summon a guess, before eventually being told the answer by a bemused Letterman – while millions of viewers looked on.

In another question, Cameron incorrectly answered as to who composed “Rule, Britannia!”, a musical piece for generations attached to the Royal Navy and further used by the British Army. He replied to Letterman,

“You’re testing me there. Elgar, I’ll go for” [Thomas Arne composed it].

Cameron was educated at Eton College in his teens, one of the most prestigious schools in the world.

The lack of awareness of Magna Carta betrays a worrying reality, as citizens like Julian Assange remain in virtual imprisonment – and in flagrant infringement of their rights of freedom. Much of Assange’s enforced detention in the Ecuadorian embassy, from June 2012 to present, occurred during Cameron’s time as leader.

In 2016, a United Nations panel [ruled that](#) his ongoing detention was “unlawful”, shedding further light on the authorities’ desecration of the very essence of Magna Carta. The UN working group called on Britain and Sweden to end the WikiLeaks founder’s “deprivation of liberty”.

Undeterred, Cameron described the UN verdict as “a ridiculous decision”, urging Assange “to end this whole sorry saga”, while saying he should “stand trial in Sweden, a country with a fair reputation for justice”. Sweden’s sex assault charges referred to were completely dropped a few months later, after a seven-year legal wrangle. Prosecutors [admitted](#), “all possibilities to conduct the investigation are exhausted”, a decision that must have

dismayed the recently departed British leader.

It appears Cameron again neglected the values set forth by the Great Charter, once a cornerstone of English law, and the inspiration behind the US Constitution and Bill of Rights. A passage from it states,

“No free man shall be taken or imprisoned or dispossessed, or outlawed or exiled, or in any way destroyed...”, and that, “to no man will we sell, or deny, or delay, right or justice”.

The Great Charter was drafted and signed alongside the River Thames in 1215, just over 20 miles from central London – the location of Assange’s indefinite confinement in the embassy.

Again the words of Cameron’s predecessor, Churchill, resonate in the background,

“We must never cease to proclaim in fearless tones the great principles of freedom and the rights of man which are the joint inheritance of the English-speaking world... through Magna Carta”.

Assange’s compatriot Gerard Brennan, the former Chief Justice of Australia, said that

“Magna Carta has lived in the hearts and minds of our people. It is an incantation of the spirit of liberty”.

The renowned Australian journalist John Pilger lamented that,

“Freedom is being lost in Britain. The land of Magna Carta is now the land of secret gagging orders, secret trials and imprisonment”.

Pilger later reflected, “as the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Magna Carta approaches [in 2015], hard-won rights such as the presumption of innocence are buried beneath the tentacular might of corporate systems”.

Assange’s plight has long been [viewed negatively](#) by the majority of those from his homeland of Australia. Only one in four Australians say he should be prosecuted for “releasing the leaked cables”, while almost 60% believe he would “not receive a fair trial in the US”.

Assange and other whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden have been denied the “spirit of liberty” espoused by the former Chief Justice of Australia. Their crimes have been to expose state misdemeanors, reveal the truth, and thereby serve the public interest. It cannot be denied as Churchill elaborated that,

“The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is”.

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*This article was originally published on [The Duran](#).*

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