

**HAMILTON INDEPENDENT MEDIA AWARDS SPEECH
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2018
HAMILTON CENTRAL LIBRARY - HAMILTON ROOM**

LYLA: The Fifth Estate.

When I first heard that phrase I only knew it as the name of a documentary series on CBC Television.

But The Fifth Estate very much defines who we are as Independent Journalists.

The idea of an Estate comes from the European concept of the three states of the realm: clergy, nobility and commoners. The Fourth Estate or fourth power refers to the press or the new media.

The Fifth Estate refers to those with outlier viewpoints in contemporary society like bloggers, journalists publishing in non-mainstream media outlets, and independent journalists using social media.

Our power to persuade and move the conversation in our communities comes with great responsibility.

As journalists we are given a public trust to uncover the truth and speak truth to power.

This is our role as journalists.

The Fifth Estate which can be a force for good and for revealing truths has also been subverted by those who know that the spreading of misinformation has power too.

We continually have to train ourselves and each other on media savvy and how to look at what comes across our social media feeds with a critical eye.

Our role as journalists is being tried and tested now more than ever.

Every day we watch in horror as the current President of the United States proclaims that something is “fake news” whenever it reveals some harsh truths about his leadership. Even worse he has called the media the “enemy of the people” and has incited violence against journalists.

CNN’s Jim Acosta is now fighting the White House in the courts to get his press credentials back after having his reputation besmirched with a doctored video posted to social media by the President’s own staff. For my Father and his parents who survived Nazis and Communists and escaped to Canada during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution these are all harbingers of Fascism.

Getting at what the truth is has become harder and harder. Leaders have no qualms about telling lies so brazen a kindergarten student can see through them, but if they stick to their talking points and repeat them over and over and over again eventually people start to regurgitate them as fact.

Really grinding down and looking past the common accepted narrative takes work. But as newsrooms across the country keep shutting down the time and money needed to do high quality investigative journalism has become challenging and daunting.

That independent journalists have been able to take on this responsibility with even less resources is inspiring and commendable.

This responsibility comes with risks.

Last year we honoured journalists David Ritchie and Jeremy Cohn after they were violently assaulted by local police and detained after trying to report on a motor vehicle accident that involved a minor.

CPJ also known as The Committee to Protect Journalists has so far documented 45 Journalists were murdered worldwide in 2018. One of them was Washington Post reporter Jamal Khashoggi who was murdered last

month while visiting the Saudi Embassy in Turkey. He had written several pieces critical of the Saudi government over the years. He was in their consulate to submit paperwork to finalize his divorce so he could legally marry his new partner. Amnesty International and thousands of journalists from across the globe are demanding justice.

In June of this year a man who was unhappy about the stories regarding his stalking on Facebook of a former classmate decided to take revenge on the reporters at The Capital Gazette and went into their newsroom with a gun and murdered five journalists.

In May of this year masked men stormed into the Montreal offices of Vice digital media apparently in an effort to intimidate journalists and show their dissatisfaction with a recent article about the far-right group Atalante Québec.

As Independent Media who are not beholden to corporate ownership we are able to peel away some of the mainstream media pabulum that the public are fed and for example go beyond asking the Neo Nazi Mayoral candidate what his stance on the LRT is.

Being an independent journalist is a calling.

We are honoured to have you among us.

Continue being truth tellers and fact seekers.

The world needs us now more than ever.

Sources

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth_Estate
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth_Estate
- <https://www.amnesty.org>
- <https://www.cjfe.org>
- <https://cpj.org>