

# Hangin' It Up? Whistle-Blowers Face Uphill Battle

When you hear a whistle in a football game, you know somebody did something wrong. It's the same way in the real world.

A whistle-blower is a person who raises a concern about wrongdoing in an organization. Usually, this person is from that organization. This misconduct may be classified in many ways, including fraud, health and safety violations or corruption.

Daniel Ellsberg, the former State Department analyst who leaked the Pentagon Papers in 1971, brought the truth of the Vietnam War to light. Ellsberg blew the whistle on the practices of deception by the Johnson and Nixon administrations, leading to less public support for the war.

A more recent case is the one of Katharine Gun, a former employee of Government Communications Headquarters, a British intelligence agency. In 2003, she leaked top-secret information to the press concerning alleged illegal activities by the United States and the United Kingdom in their push for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Her life was actually in danger for making public what was actually going on in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq.

Then the following year, 2004, Joe Darby, a member of the U.S. military police, alerted the U.S. military command of prisoner abuse in the Iraqi Abu Ghraib prison.

Whistle-blowers frequently face reprisal - sometimes at the hands of the organization or government they have accused. Fear for their lives was evident with the cases of Ellsberg, Gun and Darby.

The accused usually fights back. Take this month's trial of [Bradley Birkenfeld](#). He was absolutely essential to a landmark tax-evasion case against the Swiss bank, UBS, cheating the U.S. treasury out of \$100 billion a year.

Whistle-blower Birkenfeld on Jan. 8 began serving a 40-month sentence in a Pennsylvania federal prison. His revelations were welcomed by the Treasury

Department and Internal Revenue Service. Then the rich bankers and the tax-evaders turned on Birkenfeld, who worked for UBS and became the only one to go to jail.

Anti-corruption groups have requested a presidential pardon for him, and others across the globe have joined the case. An open letter to President Obama requests commutation for Birkenfeld in order to “reverse the devastating impact Mr. Birkenfeld’s case will have on international law enforcement efforts.”

Birkenfeld’s attorneys issued the following statement. “An American tragedy. A disgraceful miscarriage of justice. An insult to every honest American who must work hard and pay their taxes. The imprisonment of Bradley is shocking and unjustified. ... It will have a radical chilling effect [on other bankers] to step forward and expose fraud. This is devastating to any efforts to expose the use of illegal offshore bank accounts by criminals who want to avoid taxes.”

New York Post writer Juan Gonzalez wrote: “Only Birkenfeld ends up in jail - the No. 1 example of injustice and hypocrisy in the age of Obama.”

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