

Free Bradley Manning!

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The decision by the Obama administration and the Pentagon to file 22 additional criminal charges against Army Private Bradley Manning, one of which carries the death penalty, is a brutal demonstration of the vindictiveness of American imperialism. In targeting this courageous young man, the US government is at the same time seeking to intimidate all opposition to the war policies of the corporate and financial elite.

What is Manning's supposed crime? He has allegedly provided documents to the WikiLeaks web site that exposed US atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan, and diplomatic skullduggery all over the world.

The most serious new charge against Manning is that of "aiding the enemy" by supplying information "either directly or indirectly," brought under Article 104 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The Pentagon did not specify who the alleged "enemy" was, leaving open the possibility that this could refer to WikiLeaks itself—a whistleblower web site whose activities in exposing state and corporate secrets are legal and have won widespread support around the world. The designation of WikiLeaks as a US "enemy" would suggest that the web site could be targeted for military action, including both cyberwarfare and the use of deadly force against individuals like its founder, Julian Assange.

If the "enemy" refers to Al Qaeda or the Taliban, which supposedly gained access to classified US military and diplomatic documents from their being posted on the Internet, the implications are even more sweeping and reactionary. Not only Manning, but WikiLeaks and any newspaper, web site or other publication in any country that reproduced, publicized or commented on the WikiLeaks revelations could face similar charges.

Moreover, given the ubiquitous nature of the Internet, anyone who leaks classified information to any media outlet, not just WikiLeaks, could be subject to an

"aiding the enemy" prosecution. This was exactly the position taken by the Nixon administration in 1971, when Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.

In the 40 years since the Pentagon Papers, the American media has abandoned the slightest independence of the military/intelligence apparatus. The *Times* editor Bill Keller writes openly about his subservience to Pentagon and CIA censors, and unashamedly declares that freedom of the press consists in the "freedom" *not* to publish what is viewed by the government as damaging to national security.

If the same standards had been applied during the Vietnam War, not only Daniel Ellsberg but Seymour Hersh, who exposed the My Lai massacre, and dozens of other journalists would have been sent to prison for their reporting on the crimes committed by the US military and the Johnson and Nixon administrations.

In 1971, the *Times* and the *Post* went to court and eventually won a Supreme Court judgment upholding their right to publish the Pentagon Papers, a ruling that ultimately made it impossible for the Nixon administration to prosecute Ellsberg. Today, the US media's collaboration is an essential factor in facilitating the military persecution of Bradley Manning.

Not only does the US media endorse his arrest and prosecution, but there has been near-total silence over the military's abuse of Manning throughout his imprisonment. The 23-year-old soldier has been held for the last ten months in solitary confinement, subjected to methods of isolation that are brazenly abusive and have been denounced by human rights groups as torture. If an American soldier were being held under such conditions as a POW in any other country, the US government and the US media would demand the prosecution of his jailers for war crimes.

The vendetta against Bradley Manning is in sharp

contrast to the Obama administration's adamant defense of the real criminals in the American ruling elite. More than two years have passed since Obama entered the White House. In that time, not a single Bush administration official has been prosecuted for launching an illegal war based on lying to the American people. Indeed, several of the documents released by WikiLeaks expose the determined efforts of the Obama administration to prevent prosecutions in other countries. Not a single intelligence agent or official has been prosecuted for torturing prisoners. Not a single top banker or CEO has been prosecuted for the criminal practices that produced the biggest financial crash in history. And not a single executive of oil giant BP has been prosecuted for its devastation of the Gulf of Mexico.

But the full force of the capitalist state has fallen on a heroic Army private who apparently felt it his duty—justified under the principles laid down in the Nuremberg war crimes trials—to bring to public attention massive evidence of US war crimes. It seems likely that the first material supplied to WikiLeaks was the gun-camera footage showing a US helicopter gunship mowing down Iraqi civilians, including two employees of Reuters News Agency, in a Baghdad neighborhood.

If Obama had done nothing else, the decision to prosecute Bradley Manning would be sufficient to brand his administration as no less reactionary and warmongering than that of Bush and Cheney.

Millions of people marched against the Bush administration's decision to go to war in Iraq, and mass antiwar sentiment played a major role in securing Obama's victory in the campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination and then in the 2008 election itself.

Since his election, however, Obama has retained Bush's Pentagon chief, Robert Gates, and his top commander, General David Petraeus, continued the occupation of Iraq according to the timetable for "withdrawal" laid out by Bush, and dramatically escalated the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Now the administration is publicly deliberating whether to engage in a third US war in the oil-producing region, positioning military assets for possible intervention in Libya.

All these moves have taken place without the

slightest opposition from the protest organizations that condemned the Bush administration. Completely subordinated to the Democratic Party, the left-liberal milieu has directly sabotaged the development of a mass antiwar movement.

A death sentence hangs over the head of Private Bradley Manning under conditions of the reemergence of class struggle in the United States and internationally. There is an inherent connection between the brutality meted out against Manning and the viciousness with which the same representatives of the corporate elite go after the working class.

The mass struggle against war must be revived, but on a new political basis: that of opposition to the Democratic and Republican parties and the capitalist system they defend. The demand to free Bradley Manning must be inscribed on the banners of a new mass socialist movement of the working class.

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