

# Bradley Manning and the attack on democratic rights

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The persecution of whistleblower Bradley Manning is a stark warning to the entire working class. Now facing a military pretrial hearing on charges carrying a maximum sentence of death, the 24-year-old Army private is accused of leaking hundreds of thousands of government and military documents. The vindictive treatment of this courageous young man is aimed at intimidating all opposition to American imperialism.

In February 2010, whistleblower organization WikiLeaks began publishing material that Manning is accused of providing. The documents revealed the criminality of the American government and the Obama administration, along with other governments worldwide. Revelations of corruption and brutality of Middle Eastern regimes helped fuel the revolutionary upsurge across the region, beginning with the Tunisian uprising one year ago.

Many files documented US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the most explosive releases was a video, published under the title “Collateral Murder,” showing a US helicopter gunship mowing down Iraqi civilians, including children and two Reuters journalists, in a Baghdad neighborhood. In an era of highly censored coverage of US military operations, the exposure of the American public to such an atrocity had a significant impact in intensifying popular opposition to the occupation of Iraq. (See, “Leaked video shows US military killing of two Iraqi journalists.”)

Held for over a year and a half by the military, Manning has been subjected to solitary confinement, forced nakedness, sleep deprivation and other cruelties. He has been denied due process and private meetings with his legal counsel and human rights investigators.

His plight has drawn denunciations from international rights organizations as well as from masses of ordinary people all over the world. The Obama

administration—along with the entire political establishment and corporate media—has met these appeals with indifference and contempt.

The state’s treatment of Manning has been aimed at breaking his will, in the same manner that detainees at Guantanamo Bay have been compelled to confess to charges fabricated by the US government.

The Obama administration intends to use Manning in its effort to take down WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange, who is currently appealing extradition to Sweden on trumped-up sex charges. If he loses his appeal, Assange faces the possibility of extradition to the United States to be tried as a terrorist by the Justice Department or seized and imprisoned for life without trial by the US military.

As the Article 32 hearing against him enters its fourth day, Manning’s defense team must present its arguments without the testimony of 46 of the 48 witnesses it had requested. The Justice Department has a direct influence on the proceedings, in the form of Lieutenant Colonel Paul Almanza, the investigating officer and Department of Justice prosecutor who is presiding as judge in the case. Dismissing protestations of the defense that his employment constitutes a conflict of interest, Almanza and the Army have rejected calls that he recuse himself.

The methods of the Obama administration—indefinite detention, torture, suppression of information, military drumhead trials—speak volumes about its attitude toward democratic rights. Propelled into office in no small part by hatred of the militarist policies of the Bush administration, Obama has substantially expanded the military-intelligence apparatus, launched new wars, and established a policy of extrajudicial state assassination, including of US citizens.

Significantly, after pledging to create “the most

transparent administration in history,” the president has classified record amounts of data and prosecuted more government whistleblowers for “espionage” than all prior administrations combined.

The president is presently poised to sign into law the legal framework for a police state. The National Defense Authorization Act contains provisions that will allow citizens who are detained on US soil to be held indefinitely, without charge or trial, in military prisons. The bill effectively legalizes policies established by the Bush administration and expands their use onto American soil, shredding the Bill of Rights. (See “Obama, Congress back legalization of a police state”)

The prosecution of Manning is of a piece with this assault on democratic rights, supported by the entire US political establishment. The state is effectively saying that not only must it be free to commit crimes all over the world, but that anyone who seeks to expose these crimes will face the harshest punishment.

The decay of democracy in the United States is not accidental. It is deeply rooted in the breakdown of American and world capitalism. The ruling class has responded to the crisis, which has created a social catastrophe for millions of people, with increasingly vicious austerity measures. The national wealth has been funneled to an ever smaller and richer financial plutocracy.

As a result, masses of people are being pushed into class struggle. For this reason above all, Washington is laying the foundations for a police state.

Hanging over the head of Bradley Manning is a sentence of life in military prison, if not death. Working people who are concerned for his life and opposed to the war policies of US imperialism must recognize that the vendetta against Manning and other whistleblowers is inherently linked to the attack by the ruling class on the rights and living conditions of the working class as a whole.

A mass movement against war and the attack on democratic rights must be developed on the basis of an independent, revolutionary socialist strategy. Private Manning can be defended only as part of a struggle by the working class against the Obama administration, both parties of big business, and the capitalist system they serve.

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