

The Obama administration's persecution of Bradley Manning

Naomi Spencer
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The persecution of Bradley Manning at the hands of the Obama administration is a travesty of democratic rights and a warning to the entire working class.

The Obama administration intends to make an example out of the accused whistleblower. For more than 1,000 days, the 25-year-old Army Private has been imprisoned without conviction, denied his basic rights, and subjected to conditions tantamount to torture under international law. Why? Because he dared to expose the true nature of the US military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. His persecution is a stark warning to the entire working class.

In a statement read out to a military court in Fort Meade, Maryland February 28, Manning admitted responsibility for the largest leak of US government and military documents in history. Calling the material “some of the most significant documents of our time, removing the fog of war and revealing the true nature of 21st century asymmetric warfare,” Manning explained that he had wanted to “spark a domestic debate on the role of our military and foreign policy in general.”

After coming across evidence of widespread atrocities—including a video of a US helicopter gunning down innocent civilians in Iraq, later published by WikiLeaks under the title “Collateral Murder”—Manning said he felt morally obligated to alert the American public to the crimes being committed in its name. He offered the material to the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, and when neither paper expressed any interest, Manning submitted it to the whistleblower organization WikiLeaks.

For this courageous act, the Obama administration is ruthlessly pursuing charges under the Espionage Act, including a charge of “aiding the enemy,” a crime that

could carry the death penalty. Government prosecutors are seeking life in prison for the young soldier. The Army judge overseeing his pre-trial hearings has denied Manning the right to make a whistleblower defense, saying that questions of conscience—and the content of the leaked material—was irrelevant in the case.

Manning was arrested in May 2010 while working as an Army intelligence analyst outside Baghdad. He was stuffed into an outdoor cage and held in atrocious conditions with the intent to destroy him psychologically. From July 2010 to April 2011, this abuse continued at Quantico Marine brig in Virginia, where he was subjected to solitary confinement, forced nudity, and harassment by guards. These conditions drew denunciations from international human rights organizations, constitutional law scholars, and masses of ordinary people. Nevertheless, Colonel Denise Lind, the judge in the pre-trial hearings, rejected the defense council's argument that such abuse amounted to “unlawful pretrial punishment.”

Manning is a political prisoner, and his mistreatment has been aimed at breaking his will. The government has sought to force him into a plea agreement that will aid its case against WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange. That Manning has remained composed and principled throughout his ordeal is a testament to the depth of his convictions.

Assange remains in the Ecuadorian embassy in Britain, fighting extradition to Sweden on baseless sex charges. The Obama administration, anticipating his extradition from Sweden to the US, has already made preparations for a secret grand jury hearing in Alexandria, Virginia. Australian embassy reports released under freedom of information last month quoted senior US Justice Department officials as saying the investigation against WikiLeaks was

“unprecedented both in its scale and nature.”

If Manning is convicted of “aiding the enemy,” the case will set a dangerous precedent. The Obama administration’s argument is aimed at criminalizing the act of making publicly available any information it deems harmful to American imperialism’s “interests.” Media and watchdog organizations, independent journalists and bloggers, and ordinary readers accessing information online may be charged with “espionage.”

The virtual silence maintained by the corporate media in the face of this threat exposes its role as a mouthpiece for the state. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and other major newspapers carried minimal articles on Manning’s trial, focused more on defending their response to his 2010 effort to provide them information than with reporting the case. Few news outlets sent reporters to the February 28 hearing. None of the cable news networks, including MSNBC, CNN, and Fox, reported on the content of Manning’s statement.

The Obama administration is attempting to tie Manning and WikiLeaks to Al Qaeda. The government’s prosecutors have announced that they will call 141 witnesses, including some who will testify in complete anonymity and in secret. Prosecutors also claim they have evidence collected from the raid of Osama Bin Laden’s compound showing that he had accessed WikiLeaks-published material.

Essentially, the government argues that revelations of US criminality aided Al Qaeda, “the enemy,” and therefore whistle-blowing is an act of terrorism.

Obama has prosecuted more whistleblowers than all other administrations combined. Including Manning, the administration has prosecuted six people under the Espionage Act. It has classified record amounts of data in the effort to keep the world and the American people in the dark about the activities of the government—including some 50,000 pages of court documents and testimony from the Manning case.

Winning the White House on the basis of popular hatred for the Bush administration, Obama has deepened the attack on the most fundamental constitutional rights. Obama has asserted the right to assassinate anyone, including US citizens, it deems to be terrorists, even on American soil. Habeas corpus has been repudiated in the policy of indefinite military detention without charge, formally adopted into law in

the National Defense Authorization Act signed by Obama. The administration has widened domestic spying and Internet surveillance operations.

It is not the war criminals that Obama is prosecuting, but those who are alleged to have revealed the crimes. Not a single Bush administration official has been prosecuted for crimes against humanity. This is in line with the government’s handling of the economic crisis, which has been to protect and reward the criminals responsible for the collapse while attacking its victims in the form of social austerity.

Organizations that orbit the Obama administration—including the International Socialist Organization, which has published a handful of articles about the case—have likewise avoided uttering the name of Manning’s oppressor: the Democratic administration of Barack Obama. The most recent report in the *Socialist Worker*, the ISO’s publication, was a reprint of a February 22 *Belfast Telegraph* op-ed which made no mention of Obama.

The bipartisan support for the attack on democratic rights is bound up with the fact that this attack is inextricably connected to the interests of the ruling class that they both represent. As it pursues an increasingly unpopular policy—of war abroad and social austerity at home—the corporate and financial elite is preparing the framework for the repression of any opposition, at home and abroad.

The full power of the state is leveraged against Bradley Manning. Working people opposed to war and attacks on democratic rights must recognize that his defense is bound up with a fight against the Obama administration, the Democrats and Republicans, and the capitalist system they serve.



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