

The Bradley Manning verdict: Criminalizing the exposure of crimes

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On Wednesday, the day after the conviction of Bradley Manning was handed down by a military judge, the *Washington Post* published an article under the headline, “Manning’s Conviction Seen as Making Prosecution of WikiLeaks’ Assange Likely.” The *Post* noted that the prosecutors—that is, the Obama administration—specifically tailored their case against Manning to implicate the founder of WikiLeaks.

“Military prosecutors in the court-martial portrayed [Julian] Assange as an ‘information anarchist’ who encouraged Manning... And they insisted that the anti-secrecy group cannot be considered a media organization that published the leaked information in the public interest,” the *Post* wrote. The prosecution continually sought to present Assange as a co-conspirator.

Other articles sounded a similar theme, including one by the Associated Press stating that Manning’s conviction “gives a boost to the Obama administration’s aggressive pursuit of people it believes have leaked national security secrets to the media.” In addition to Assange, the AP noted that “the government’s case against National Security Agency leaker Edward Snowden” will likely be “similar to the Manning prosecution.”

This is further evidence that the kangaroo-court trial of the young whistle-blower Manning is part of a ruthless government campaign to criminalize all exposures of government criminality.

The prosecution of Manning, who faces a maximum sentence of 136 years in prison, is intended as an example and a precedent. Whistle-blowing, the government is declaring, amounts to espionage and treason.

The Obama administration has already opened up a grand jury investigation into Assange and WikiLeaks,

and there are reports that a secret indictment has been filed. It has submitted charges against Snowden under the Espionage Act for his actions in exposing illegal government spying programs. If either Snowden or Assange is captured by the United States, there is no doubt that he will face a fate equal to, or worse, than Manning’s.

Obama, along with top officials in the military and intelligence apparatus, is acutely aware that the actions taken over the past decade violate innumerable laws and constitutional provisions.

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks, under the pretext of the “war on terror,” the American ruling class, first under Bush and then under Obama, has engaged in wanton criminality, only a small portion of which has been exposed by the revelations of Manning and Snowden. Washington is responsible for torture centers all over the world, domestic spying on an unparalleled scale, illegal rendition, the assassination of US citizens, and secret anti-democratic laws drawn up by secret courts.

On Wednesday, the *Guardian* reported on yet another surveillance program, XKeyscore, that allows NSA analysts—contrary to the testimony of government and intelligence officials—to comb through “vast databases containing emails, online chats and browsing histories of millions of individuals” without a court order.

All of these crimes flow from the illegal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Manning himself was moved by the atrocities he witnessed in Iraq in a war based on outright lies. Hundreds of thousands have been killed. Entire cities have been destroyed.

The wars against Afghanistan and Iraq have been followed by other war crimes, with the US government now operating a fleet of drones that rain death on peoples throughout the world.

Manning is to spend decades in jail, if not his entire life, for helping to expose these crimes, while those who carried them out walk free or occupy plush offices in the White House.

Of particular concern to the ruling class is that individuals like Manning and Snowden, utilizing the power of the Internet, have been able to bypass the stranglehold of the American media, which has aided and abetted every government conspiracy against the population.

The *New York Times* in particular played an indispensable role in propagating the lies used to launch the war in Iraq and has utilized its pages to carry out a smear campaign against Assange and Snowden. In a two-faced editorial Wednesday, the *Times* declared, “There is no question that Private Manning broke laws.” This—a cowardly statement worthy of scoundrels—was published as Manning faces life in prison for exposing government illegality!

A companion “news” article published the same day, entitled “Loner Sought a Refuge, and Ended Up In a War,” began with a gratuitous reference to military prosecutors who “called [Manning’s actions] one of the greatest betrayals in the nation’s history.”

Manning, Assange and Snowden have put their lives at risk to expose to the American people the secret actions of a military-intelligence apparatus that operates without constraint and above the law.

In considering the fate of these individuals, one is reminded of the prosecution of Hans and Sophie Scholl, executed for treason for distributing leaflets as part of the White Rose group that opposed the Nazi regime in Germany and exposed its mass murder of Jews, Poles and Russians. (A cinematic rendition of the Scholl’s trial can be found here.)

“Where we stand today, you will stand soon,” Sophie Scholl proclaimed before she was sentenced by the Nazi judge Roland Freisler and beheaded. And she was proven correct.

In its contempt of legal norms, the attitude that prevails in the corridors of power in the United States is not fundamentally different from that of Hitler’s Germany. Laws exist solely for the purpose of advancing the interests of the ruling class that controls the state. They can be violated by the executive at will, receiving, if it is convenient, the endorsement of the courts and a servile Congress. Exposure of these

violations, carried out in the public interest, is by definition illegal because it violates the secrecy demanded in the name of “national security.”

The crimes of the Hitler regime—including the mass internment and execution of political dissidents—have yet to be replicated in the United States. However, the logic of dictatorship is the same—a logic that is driven by the irreconcilable antagonism between the interests of a parasitic financial aristocracy and the vast majority of the population.

There is immense popular sympathy for Manning, Snowden and Assange. The measures that they have exposed are unpopular, which is why the ruling class must conceal them.

This sympathy must be translated into a conscious political movement, one that connects the defense of democracy with the overthrow of the corrupt economic and political system that prevails in the United States and around the world.



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