

# Bradley Manning's statement: A forced "confession" concludes a drumhead tribunal

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Army PFC Bradley Manning addressed the military tribunal at Ft. Meade, Maryland yesterday in the eleventh day of post-trial sentencing hearings. The 25-year-old whistle-blower was found guilty last month on 19 counts, including six charges of espionage. He faces up to 90 years in prison.

Manning's comments yesterday reflect the tremendous element of coercion in the entire proceedings. In all, the episode more closely resembled a Stalinist show trial than a democratic court of law.

"First, your honor, I want to start off with an apology," he told Army Col. Denise Lind, the military judge overseeing the proceedings. "I'm sorry that my actions hurt people, and I'm sorry that it hurt the United States. I understand what I was doing and the decision that I made. I'm sorry for the unintended consequences of my actions."

Noting that he would "have to pay a price for my decisions and actions," Manning pled for a lower sentence.

"How on Earth could I, a junior analyst, possibly believe I could change the world for the better over those with the proper authority? I know that I can and will be a better person. I hope that you can give me the opportunity to prove, not through words but through conduct, that I can return to a productive place in society."

Manning delivered these comments in a visible state of despondency—he shook and grew tearful as he spoke. That a defendant in a legal proceeding is forced to apologize for and denounce his acts of opposition underscores the advanced state of decay of American democracy. Such sordid events bear the badge of a police state.

In fact, Manning's actions did not hurt anyone but the politicians and military officials that have waged

one illegal war after the next. In providing documents to WikiLeaks, he performed an immense service to the population of the United States and the entire world.

Moreover, in verbally repudiating the suggestion that he, as an individual, "could change the world for the better over those with the proper authority," Manning implicitly condemns the state and the Obama administration. It is as if the American ruling class, through this confession, is seeking to convince the population, and itself, that opposition is useless.

That the state feels compelled to extract this *mea culpa* is a reflection of its own deep-seated fear. Those with the "proper authority" are well aware that they have committed grave crimes, even as they dare to stand in judgment of those who, like Manning, have revealed them.

Considering his past treatment, it is understandable that Manning wants to put an end to the entire antidemocratic charade perpetrated against him.

In his three years in captivity, Manning has been subjected to mental and physical forms of torture, including being placed for months in a 6 foot by 12 foot cell for 23 hours a day. This so-called pretrial detention was in direct violation of the Sixth Amendment to the US Constitution, which guarantees the right to a speedy trial, and the Eighth Amendment, which bans cruel and unusual punishment of prisoners.

His sham military trial, like his imprisonment, has been a mockery of due process. Judge Lind has barred the utilization of any politically motivated defense by Manning. The court has drastically limited the rights of journalists covering the trial. The proceedings occur under censorship—the military has been able to limit access of key information to journalists and the public, ostensibly on account of potential damage to national security.

There is a sharp contrast between Manning's comments yesterday and a statement he made in February, in which he asserted that the American people had the right to know the "true costs of war."

"I believed if the public, particularly the American public, could see this that it could spark a debate on the military and our foreign policy in general [that] might cause society to reconsider the need to engage in counter-terrorism while ignoring the human situation of the people we engaged with every day."

In an attempt to neutralize Manning's potential as an icon of opposition, both the prosecution and the defense have worked at length to portray Manning as mentally unstable and plagued with eccentric personal insecurities. The trial has been marked by an obsessive focus on Manning's sexuality, his psychological motives. Photographs of Manning dressed in make-up, wig, and women's clothing have been published.

One reads with sadness Manning's verbal repudiation of his noble actions, a repudiation extracted through psychological and physical abuse and the threat of a life in prison. That the Obama administration and the state apparatus feel the need to extract such statements and to compel political prisoners to speak in this way only adds to their own moral degradation, giving further proof of the putrefaction of what passes for American democracy.



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