

Political prisoner Chelsea Manning begins hunger strike

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12 September 2016

Political prisoner and whistleblower Chelsea Manning began a hunger strike on Friday in military prison in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where she is currently serving a 35-year sentence under deplorable conditions.

Manning, formerly known as Bradley Manning, is the former US Army specialist who was the source of major releases by WikiLeaks, including the Collateral Murder video that shows a US Army gunship mowing down civilians in Baghdad, the Iraq War Logs, the Guantanamo Bay files, the Afghan War Diary, and a cache of hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables shedding light on the machinations of American imperialism.

Manning explained in a written statement that she was protesting the discriminatory treatment that she, as a transgendered woman, has received while in prison.

“I need help. I am not getting any,” Manning wrote. “My [requests have] only been ignored, delayed, mocked, given trinkets and lip service by the prison, the military, and this administration.”

Despite announcing that she was transgendered in 2013, shortly after her sentencing, Manning has been forced to serve her sentence in an all-male prison and to cut her hair short to meet military standards. She is demanding written assurances that she will receive her prescribed medications for her gender dysphoria.

Prison officials have routinely blocked her access to treatment such as hormone injections, prompting her lawyers to file a lawsuit in 2014. This has contributed to severe and ongoing clinical depression, for which she has not received regular care, and which led Manning to attempt suicide in early July.

“I was driven to suicide by the lack of care for my gender dysphoria that I have been desperate for. I didn’t get any. I still haven’t gotten any. I needed help.

Yet, instead I am now being punished for surviving my attempt.”

The government responded to Manning’s attempted suicide by filing additional charges; she now faces the prospect of indefinite solitary confinement, reclassification into maximum security and an additional nine years tacked onto her sentence, with no possibility of parole.

“Today, I have decided that I am no longer going to be bullied by this prison—or by anyone within the U.S. government,” Manning concluded. “Until I am shown dignity and respect as a human again, I shall endure this pain before me. I am prepared for this mentally and emotionally. I expect that this ordeal will last for a long time. Quite possibly until my permanent incapacitation or death. I am ready for this. I need help. Please, give me help.”

Manning’s increasingly desperate situation in prison is the direct result of malicious persecution by the US government. It is no exaggeration to say that the Obama administration is seeking to hound Manning to her death.

Since her initial arrest and imprisonment in 2010, the military and Obama administration have been determined to make an example of her, through an unending campaign of torture and harassment, as a deterrent against future whistleblowers.

For the first ten months, Manning was placed in solitary confinement for twenty-three and a half hours per day, under the pretext of being placed on “suicide watch,” and subjected to routine humiliation through daily strip searches.

Last year, Manning was threatened with indefinite solitary confinement for minor violations of prison rules, such as “sweeping food onto the floor,” possession of unauthorized reading material and

possession of a tube of expired toothpaste (officially, “medical misuse”).

According to ChelseaManning.org, the charges were retaliation against Manning over an incident in which she had asked for a lawyer after being confronted by a prison guard in the mess hall. Manning was later given the lesser punishment of 21 days of restriction from recreational areas or going outdoors, after a public petition in her defense attracted more than 100,000 signatures.

The retaliation against Manning after her suicide attempt in July, which includes, once again, the threat of indefinite solitary confinement, is particularly vindictive. Solitary confinement, which has been deemed a form of torture by the United Nations, has been linked by scientific studies to significantly higher rates of suicide among prison inmates.

A 2014 study in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that more than 70 percent of all suicides in California prisons occurred among inmates placed in isolation. A lawyer for Manning from the ACLU explained that her “big fear is formal isolation. She relies on access to phone and written communication. If that were cut off, I’d be even more worried.”

Manning’s principled and courageous stand in bringing to public attention the crimes of American imperialism has earned her the respect and admiration of millions throughout the world. At the same time, she has earned the hatred of those in the state apparatus who understand that her decision to risk prosecution in order to expose their crimes is only an initial expression of the growth of anti-war sentiment and social opposition more broadly. This sentiment is growing, particularly among those of Manning’s generation who have come of age in the last fifteen years under the shadow of the massive expansion of American militarism and assault on democratic rights under the framework of the so-called War on Terror.

Significantly, Manning’s hunger strike has elicited a stony silence from the Obama administration and most sections of the American establishment media. Neither the Defense Department nor the Justice Department, which is conducting the retaliatory investigation after Manning’s suicide, issued statements on the matter, nor did either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump, the two main candidates in the current presidential election. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, which

traditionally set the agenda for the rest of the American media, ran only brief wire reports.

By contrast, the same day that Manning announced her hunger strike, sections of the media were busy manufacturing a new round of provocations against WikiLeaks, on the basis of an anonymous “leak” from a criminal investigation launched against the journalistic organization by the federal government, accusing it of censoring financial transactions between Syrian and Russian banks in its release of “The Syria Files.”

The original report from the Dailymail web site also accused WikiLeaks of issuing veiled threats against them for publishing the story. The slanderous article is in line with attempts to portray WikiLeaks’ release of internal Democratic National Committee emails as being masterminded by Russian President Vladimir Putin in order to influence the US presidential elections.



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