

Oppose the ban on Chelsea Manning speaking in Australia!

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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In a direct attack on democratic rights and freedom of speech, the newly-installed Liberal-National Coalition government of Prime Minister Scott Morrison has declared its intent to deny courageous US military whistleblower Chelsea Manning a visa to address what are expected to be large audiences in major Australian cities.

Just days before Manning was due to speak in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, and then in Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand, the Australian government issued her with a “Notice on Intention” to deny her an entry visa. This was done on the spurious grounds that she fails the Migration Act’s “character test” because of a “substantial criminal record.” Similar moves are underway to ban her from New Zealand.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) condemns the planned political censorship and demands its immediate reversal. Manning is not a “criminal.” Her heroic act in leaking more than 750,000 classified US military and diplomatic documents, which were then published by WikiLeaks in 2010, exposed the real criminals, who still sit in power in Washington and Canberra.

Manning is being denied her fundamental democratic right to speak publicly about her actions. The people of Australia and New Zealand are being denied their basic democratic right to hear her speak and discuss the political implications of her revelations.

Chelsea Manning, formerly Private Bradley Manning, was incarcerated and tortured in military prisons and sentenced to 35 years’ imprisonment under the Obama administration. Having enforced her vicious punishment, Obama finally commuted her sentence in 2017 after she had suffered a total of seven years in a prison cell, but deliberately left her “criminal record” on the books.

That was because the video footage, documents and

files that the young US army intelligence analyst made available to the world’s population laid bare the murders, war crimes, human rights abuses and anti-democratic political machinations of the US military, intelligence agencies and political establishment as well as those of its allies, including Australia.

Manning’s leaks, and WikiLeaks publication of them, provided essential evidence for the prosecution of those responsible for the illegal invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and the death of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians.

While the Morrison government is moving to ban Manning, successive Australian governments, both Coalition and Labor, have rolled out the red carpet to the very war criminals whose atrocities she exposed.

Over the past year and a half alone, this has included now deceased Republican Party powerbroker Senator John McCain, ex-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, along with a steady procession of admirals and generals. These are the people who should have been put on trial, along with ex-presidents Bush and Obama and their Australian partners, including former prime ministers John Howard, Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard.

Coming less than a week after Morrison was installed via an inner-party coup that ousted Malcolm Turnbull, the ban on Manning is another signal of the Coalition government’s total commitment to the preparations by the US ruling class for further war crimes, above all its plans for a military confrontation with China. The message is clear—the Australian ruling elite will eviscerate every basic democratic right to prevent widespread popular opposition to militarism developing into a mass anti-war movement.

The contrast could not be starker. One of Morrison’s first acts as prime minister was to hold a “warm” phone

call with US President Donald Trump and invite him to visit Australia.

Warmongers are welcome. Those who have sought to oppose war are not.

There is no doubt that the decision to block Manning's visit has been taken in the closest consultation with the Trump administration and the US intelligence agencies. Politically, however, the government has only dared take this step because it can confidently expect no serious opposition from the Labor Party, which declared WikiLeaks had carried out "criminal activity" by publishing Manning's leaks in 2010.

Moreover, virtually the entire erstwhile "liberal" and "left" of the Australian political and media establishment has abandoned any defence of WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange.

Assange, an Australian citizen, remains trapped in a tiny room in Ecuador's London embassy, cut off from all communication with the world. The refusal of successive Labor and Coalition governments to use its diplomatic power and legal discretion to secure his release—with years of silent complicity by the Greens and parliamentary independents such as Andrew Wilkie—has left Assange under the constant threat of arrest and extradition to the US to face espionage-related charges.

Apart from well-known journalist John Pilger and a small number of other principled individuals, no political party, trade union, civil liberties' organisation or media publication has taken up the demand issued by the SEP at a globally-broadcast rally in Sydney Town Hall Square on June 17 that the Coalition government act immediately to secure Assange's unconditional right to return to Australia.

It is in this fetid atmosphere of contempt for democratic rights and freedom of speech that Manning faces being blocked from visiting Australia.

The attack on Chelsea Manning, on top of Canberra's central role in the persecution of Assange, has ominous implications for the democratic rights of the working class.

As the preparations for involvement in further US-led wars intensify, accompanied by escalating austerity and social inequality, state repression will be used against social unrest and political dissent, particularly anti-war opposition. Just two months ago, the Labor Party joined

hands with the Coalition to push through parliament unprecedented "foreign interference" laws designed to criminalise any supposed links to China and opposition to Australian involvement in US-instigated military aggression.

The ban on Manning is a further warning that Morrison's government represents a further lurch by the entire political establishment toward war preparations and efforts to create a far-right movement to divert the mounting social and political discontent in poisonous nationalist directions.

The SEP demands that Chelsea Manning is immediately granted her visa and restates its demand for the unconditional freedom of Julian Assange. Their fate cannot be left in the hands of capitalist governments and courts. Workers and young people in Australia, New Zealand and internationally must come to the defence of these two brave figures, as an essential component of the fight for all the democratic and social rights of the working class.

See also:

John Pilger's speech to the June 17 rally
Bringing Julian Assange Home

James Cogan's speech to the June 17 rally
The Turnbull government must act to repatriate
Australian citizen Julian Assange to Australia



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