

National Party seeks to prevent Chelsea Manning from entering New Zealand

The Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand)
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New Zealand's opposition National Party has demanded that whistleblower Chelsea Manning be barred from entering the country. Its immigration spokesman Michael Woodhouse declared that if he were still the minister in charge, he would not grant Manning an entry visa.

Manning is scheduled to give public talks in Auckland and Wellington on September 8 and September 9, following events this weekend in Australia. Manning was denied entry to Canada last year. This morning Australian Immigration Minister David Coleman issued a notice that he intends to deny Manning a visa just days before her scheduled appearance.

New Zealand's Labour Party-led coalition government has yet to announce if Manning will be allowed into the country. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and other ministers have refused to comment on the matter.

The Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand) demands that Manning be granted a visa immediately to enter New Zealand. National's push for her to be barred from entry is a dangerous attack on free speech and democratic rights that must be opposed by the working class. It is part of the escalating measures by governments throughout the world aimed at suppressing opposition to austerity and war, as the US ruling elite escalates its military threats against Syria, Iran, North Korea, China and Russia.

Woodhouse told Fairfax Media that Manning was a "convicted felon... wanting to be hailed as a hero for stealing military secrets and state secrets. She was convicted of very serious crimes." He added that New Zealand's "very good and friendly relationship with the US... would not be enhanced" by Manning's visit.

These comments were supported by right-wing

commentators such as the *New Zealand Herald*'s Mike Hosking who labelled Manning "a crook" and also called for the imprisonment of her "fellow conspirator," WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

A former US Army private, Manning was imprisoned under the Obama administration for the supposed "crime" of leaking classified military documents to the anti-secrecy organisation WikiLeaks exposing war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. These include the well-known "Collateral Murder" video showing a US helicopter gunship's massacre of civilians, including journalists, in Iraq.

Manning was released last year after more than seven years in prison, where she was subjected to brutal treatment, including extended solitary confinement, which amounts to torture. She became severely depressed and attempted suicide. Although Manning's 35-year sentence imposed by a military court-martial was commuted, she was never pardoned by Obama.

The Obama administration persecuted numerous whistleblowers including Edward Snowden and Assange, who remains confined in the Ecuadorian embassy in London without internet access or any communication with the outside world except for his lawyers. Washington is seeking Assange's extradition and imprisonment in the US.

According to a press release by her promoters, Manning intends to speak in New Zealand about "her time in prison, transgender issues, privacy, and WikiLeaks."

Undoubtedly, both the call by the NZ National Party to deny entry to Manning and the Australian government's notice of intent, were made in consultation with Washington, the countries' main ally. Woodhouse's statement coincided with a two-day meeting of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence network

in Australia, attended by New Zealand's immigration minister, Iain Lees-Galloway, and Andrew Little, the minister in charge of the intelligence agencies. The Five Eyes—the spy agencies of the US, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand—were exposed by Snowden for mass spying on the world's population.

Successive National and Labour Party governments in New Zealand have participated for more than 15 years in the criminal US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the cables released by WikiLeaks in 2010, from the US embassy in Wellington, revealed that the Labour Party government of Helen Clark sent troops to Iraq in 2003 at least partly to protect lucrative export contracts for New Zealand dairy company Fonterra.

The current government of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has kept around 100 troops in Iraq and is increasing military spending in order to integrate New Zealand into the US build-up against China.

The Green Party hypocritically criticised National's call for Manning to be banned. Green MP Golriz Ghahraman wrote in a Fairfax Media column that Manning revealed "serious crimes committed by those in power... In what kind of surreal nightmare does a person who exposes war crimes against civilians and journalists undergo lifelong punishment?"

The Greens, however, are an integral part of the present Labour-led government, which continues to participate in the US-led wars and mass surveillance. Ghahraman and other Green MPs have not opposed the ongoing persecution of Assange, who has been effectively imprisoned for six years and is now being censored by the Ecuadorian government.

The Greens have helped pave the way for censorship. In July, Green co-leader Marama Davidson endorsed Auckland Mayor Phil Goff's decision to ban far-right Canadian speakers Stefan Molyneux and Lauren Southern from hiring council-owned speaking venues during their visit to the city.

The decision by Goff, a former Labour Party leader, provided the pair with massive media attention, including lengthy TV interviews, which they used to spout racist and anti-Muslim views. At the same time, Goff's ban set a precedent for barring access to council venues for other speakers with alternative political views.

Davidson wrote on Facebook on July 7: "Good to use

our freedom of speech to say your racist bigoted views aren't going to be catered for here. Thanks Phil. These two can get out." Ghahraman told TVNZ on Tuesday: "I probably wouldn't have given the visa to them."

Auckland Peace Action, a pseudo-left organisation supportive of the Greens, went even further. Its spokesperson Valerie Morse, a self-styled anarchist who is often quoted in the media, demanded that the Labour government prevent Molyneux and Southern from entering the country. Morse promised that "if they come, we will blockade entry to their speaking venue."

In contrast to such middle-class protest groups, the Socialist Equality Group (NZ) opposes, as a matter of principle, all efforts to strengthen the power of the state to restrict free speech, freedom of movement across borders and other democratic rights. History demonstrates that such measures, regardless of the initial targets, are inevitably used against left-wing, anti-war and anti-capitalist organisations and individuals.

Using the pretext of combating "fake news" and "Russian interference," technology giants Google and Facebook, in alliance with the US and other governments, are engaged in a campaign to censor the internet. They are targeting several left-wing websites including the *World Socialist Web Site*, which has seen a major drop in traffic from Google searches over the past year (see: "Facebook escalates censorship of left-wing, anti-war organisations").

The defence of Chelsea Manning must be taken up by the working class as part of an international campaign against censorship and in defence of whistleblowers including Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. Such a campaign will involve a political struggle against the entire political establishment, including the Labour Party, the Greens and their pseudo-left backers, which support imperialist war and are hostile to democratic rights.



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