

Workers and youth oppose Australian government ban on Chelsea Manning

Our reporters
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Workers and youth attending live video link meetings with Chelsea Manning in Sydney and Melbourne on September 2 and 7 respectively denounced the Australian government's decision to ban the whistleblower from entering the country.

Bree, a tourism and travel student, spoke with *World Socialist Web Site* reporters after attending the Melbourne meeting. "The government ban is completely outrageous, especially since Manning was given clemency for the initial crime, even though I don't believe it should be a crime," she said.

"It's just a complete lack of free speech and it's ridiculous. The government has done this because it's afraid of any sort of threat to it, particularly from the left, because [Manning] can enlighten people about the atrocities that are being committed all over the world and which the Australian government often enable and aid.

"What's happening with Assange is completely disgusting," she added. It's a disgrace that western governments—Australia, the US and UK—are threatening him and that Ecuador is bowing down.

"The US have been in Iraq pretty much my whole life... and it doesn't even have a definition of winning. They keep moving the goal posts, from weapons of mass destruction, to getting rid of terrorists completely and then to specific groups. The goals keep moving and moving and moving but they should stop destroying the country."

Mark, an event manager, came to the Melbourne meeting. "I want to hear her side of the story," he said. "I think the issue is about human rights and freedom of information. The ban on Manning is ridiculous. This is the American push for Australia to be their friends and [Immigration Minister] Peter Dutton has done this because he wants to keep that relationship.

Toni said: "The government is afraid of losing their power, status and position" and is "not prepared to allow people to have their say... They let in warmongers—they're like a clan—but it's the military industrial complex at work here again, and it's all about money as well."

Christian, 57, and son Daniel, 18, spoke to the WSWs after Manning had addressed a 1,500-strong audience at the Sydney Opera House. "I wanted to hear her perspective on what drove her to release the documents, particularly the Apache helicopter attack on journalists in Iraq, and how she wanted to implement social change," Christian explained.

"She was very guarded and fact-focused. I wanted to ask if she has been constrained by the US military or legal system that [might have] have said she is not allowed to talk about that, and whether she would be in breach of parole and chucked back into jail."

Asked about the impact Manning's leaks had on them, and the official justifications for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Christian said, "It totally undermined them. We all knew there were no weapons of mass destruction!"

Daniel recounted his reaction to seeing the Collateral Murder video for the first time. "It was honestly quite shocking and inhumane and I thought this can't be real. The language of the soldiers was quite despicable," he said.

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Christian added: "We have to hold our governments accountable for what they do. There's got to be a groundswell on social media to defend freedom of speech. Manning isn't a terrorist, she isn't coming here to incite violence, and yet they allow others with less reputable reputations in."

The government ban on Manning “was plain censorship,” Daniel said. “They didn’t want Chelsea speaking her opinion but she did anyway, via satellite, and the effect was still profound and valuable. We should all be advocates for freedom of information and freedom of speech. Everyone has the right to display what they want, especially the governmental information, which should be released to the people.”

Mark, who also attended the Sydney event, said: “I don’t like our government telling us what we can and can’t hear. There’s a culture of silence in this country and it’s growing. The government wants to shut all dialogue down and uses the ogre of terrorism as a shield to do that. This is a worldwide trend and it’s very oppressive and dangerous.

“I thought Manning’s vulnerability and humility at the meeting was very powerful. She personified an opposition to the status quo in a very human and powerful way...

“It’s now up to individuals to take up the gauntlet. As she said, ‘We are all political but what type of politics and what type of politician are we?’ That was a very powerful message and a very confronting one to me,” he said.

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