Chelsea Manning held in solitary confinement for more than two weeks

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The World Socialist Web Site *and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) are playing a leading role in organizing opposition to the imprisonment of Chelsea Manning and the persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Meetings and rallies are currently scheduled for Tuesday, March 26 at San Diego State University and Northern Virginia Community College. Click* here *for more information.*

On Saturday afternoon, Chelsea Manning's support committee issued a press release reporting that she has been subjected to solitary confinement since her incarceration at Truesdale Adult Detention Center in Alexandria, Virginia beginning March 8.

Manning was jailed more than two weeks ago by US Eastern District Court of Virginia Judge Claude Hilton on charges of contempt for refusing to testify before a grand jury empaneled for the purpose of crafting frame-up charges against WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange. The WikiLeaks founder and publisher has himself been living under extremely isolated conditions in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London since 2012 under a grant of asylum.

The malicious imprisonment of Manning in solitary confinement is an effort by the US District Court to force her to testify before the secret grand jury that is drawing up an indictment against Assange. It must also be seen as an effort to mete out further retribution on Manning for courageously exposing US war crimes in the Middle East.

In 2010, Manning leaked documents revealing innumerable war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan to WikiLeaks, including the now infamous "Collateral Murder" video which shows a 2007 US helicopter gun ship assault in Baghdad that killed 16 civilians, including two Reuters journalists. Manning was arrested by the military in 2010, under the Obama administration, and subjected to years of imprisonment and solitary confinement. After a trial, she was sentenced to 35 years in military prison, of which she served seven before her sentence was commuted by Obama in 2017.

Condemning the latest measures against Manning as torture, the support committee demanded that the courageous whistleblower be freed from solitary immediately. The statement reads in part, "Since her arrival at Truesdale on March 8th, Chelsea has been placed in administrative segregation, or 'adseg,' a term designed to sound less cruel than 'solitary confinement.' However, Chelsea has been kept in her cell for 22 hours a day.

"Chelsea can't be out of her cell while any other prisoners are out, so she cannot talk to other people, or visit the law library, and has no access to books or reading material. She has not been outside for 16 days. She is permitted to make phone calls and move about outside her cell between 1 and 3 a.m."

Prison officials have claimed that high profile prisoners are kept in "adseg" for their own protection and Dana Lawhorne, the sheriff of Alexandria, Virginia told a CNN reporter that claims of torture were "not accurate" and it is "unfair to claim that there is a 'conspiracy' of any kind."

However, the Manning support committee statement points out that her confinement for more than 15 days actually constitutes "prolonged solitary." The committee's online press release provides a link to a document called "A Sourcebook on Solitary Confinement," by Juan E. Me?ndez, UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, that substantiates both their claims of torture and prolonged solitary confinement.

If not for the brave stand taken by Manning, the existence of the grand jury and the possibility of US charges against Assange would likely not be known to the world. The brutal treatment of Manning and the secret case against Assange are coming up at this moment for obvious reasons.

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A major premise of the Special Counsel probe of Robert Mueller—whose full report has just been delivered to the US Justice Department—hinges on the unsubstantiated assertion that the Russian government hacked Democratic National Committee (DNC) mail servers and delivered the email contents to Julian Assange and WikiLeaks before the 2016 US elections.

Assange has repeatedly denied this explanation for how the DNC messages were provided to WikiLeaks. The publication of those messages—especially those of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta—one month before the 2016 elections exposed the depth of political conspiracy within the Democratic Party against the candidacy of Bernie Sanders as well as the obsequious relationship between Hillary Clinton and the Wall Street oligarchy.

Concerns about how solitary confinement will impact Manning's health are very real. However, the committee statement says firmly, "Chelsea is a principled person, and she has made clear that while this kind of treatment will harm her, and will almost certainly leave lasting scars, it will never make her change her mind about cooperating with the grand jury."

As exposed in a legal motion filed by her attorneys opposing the grand jury subpoena, Manning has been the subject of continuous harassment and illegal electronic surveillance since her sentence was commuted on January 17, 2017 and she left the US Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth. Manning is recognized worldwide as a soldier who stood up against and exposed the secret operations of the most criminal enterprise the world has ever known, the US military.

Workers, students and young people must continue their efforts to demand the release of Manning from prison for refusing to comply with a subpoena that violates her First and Fifth Amendment rights and is a blatant abuse of the grand jury process.

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