

Chelsea Manning faces \$441,000 in fines and another year in jail for refusing to testify against WikiLeaks

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Federal District Judge Anthony Trenga rejected a motion Monday from imprisoned whistleblower Chelsea Manning to reconsider the imposition of daily fines for her principled refusal to testify before a grand jury impaneled to bring frame-up charges against WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange.

Manning has been held in contempt of court for 149 days in the Alexandria City Jail. She now owes \$40,000 in fines and is being assessed \$1,000 for every day she refuses to testify, up from \$500 per day assessed in her second month of confinement.

Manning expects to spend approximately 400 more days in jail if the grand jury does not conclude before its 18-month term is up. This means she would face a total of \$441,000 in fines.

The 31-year-old former Army intelligence analyst is being vindictively pursued by the Trump administration for her role in exposing US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. She leaked to WikiLeaks hundreds of thousands of military war logs, diplomatic cables and the infamous Collateral Murder video, which showed an Apache helicopter airstrike in Baghdad that killed at least a dozen civilians, including two Reuters journalists.

Manning was already convicted in 2013 on a number of charges, including under the Espionage Act. She served seven years in military detention, including one year in solitary confinement, before her 35-year sentence was commuted by President Barack Obama in 2017 as part of a cynical effort to burnish his record just before leaving office.

Assange is currently being imprisoned at Belmarsh Prison in England after being illegally snatched by police from the Ecuadorian embassy in London where

he had been granted asylum. He was quickly convicted on a bogus bail-jumping charge and is awaiting an extradition hearing February 25 on his rendition to the United States.

Assange currently faces 18 charges, including 17 under the Espionage Act, and up to 175 years in prison for publishing the information which he received from Manning in 2010.

Last month, federal district judge John Koeltl dismissed a civil lawsuit filed by the Democratic National Committee which attempted to smear WikiLeaks and Assange as assets of the Russian government for publishing leaked DNC emails during the 2016 election. The ruling was a vindication of WikiLeaks's rights as a publisher and exposed the ongoing effort to prosecute Assange over the publication of the documents provided by Manning.

The fact that Manning is still being detained in an effort to compel her testimony indicates that further charges are being considered which would be unsealed once Assange is firmly in Washington's grips—even though current British and US law does not allow for further charges to be unsealed after a formal extradition request.

The charge which was used to justify the ending of his asylum and removal from the embassy, conspiracy to commit computer intrusion, names Manning as a co-conspirator, raising the prospect that she could also face criminal charges.

However, Manning has not yet been charged with any crime, and therefore cannot legally be punished. Trenga was at pains to insist in his ruling that the fines are merely coercive and not punitive.

Trenga, appointed to the bench by George W. Bush in

2008, ruled that there are no “reasonable grounds” to reconsider the fines since Manning “has the ability to comply with the court’s financial sanctions or will have the ability after her release from confinement.”

Her attorneys have argued that the fines are punitive rather than coercive, since there is nothing which will convince Manning to testify before the current grand jury or any other and since the unprecedented financial penalties threaten her with financial bankruptcy.

Manning has already lost her apartment, has no personal savings and is unable to work while in jail. Her only source of income prior to being incarcerated came from intermittent speaking fees.

In the face of the mounting fines and continued imprisonment, Manning has remained steadfast in her convictions.

“I am disappointed but not at all surprised” by the ruling, she said. “The government and the judge must know by now that this doesn’t change my position one bit.” During her contempt hearing in May, Manning told Trenga that she would “rather starve to death than to change my opinion in this regard.”

At the end of that month she submitted a letter outlining her politically principled objections to the grand jury system in general and its specific use against Assange and WikiLeaks.

“I believe in due process, freedom of the press, and a transparent court system,” Manning wrote. “I object to the use of grand juries as tools to tear apart vulnerable communities. I object to this grand jury in particular as an effort to frighten journalists and publishers, who serve a crucial public good. I have had these values since I was a child, and I’ve had years of confinement to reflect on them. For much of that time, I depended for survival on my values, my decisions, and my conscience. I will not abandon them now.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties (SEP) affiliated with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) put out the call in June for the formation of a Global Defense Committee to secure the freedom of Assange and Manning. Protests and interventions to raise awareness about their joint persecution have been organized by the ICFI and other supporters of WikiLeaks around the world, including in England, Australia, Sri Lanka and India.

Time is of the essence for Manning and Assange,

whose health, journalist John Pilger reports, is deteriorating and who is being treated worse than a murder suspect. The attack on Manning and Assange is part of a global assault on democratic rights, aimed at silencing journalists and intimidating all those who would expose the war crimes of the imperialist powers.

Manning and Assange’s freedom will not be won through moral appeals to the various governments that are engaged in a conspiracy against them, whether in London and Canberra or Quito and Washington, D.C. Instead, this movement must come from below through a campaign to mobilize the international working class, students, artists, intellectuals and journalists to save the lives of these two courageous individuals.



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