Chelsea Manning challenges attempt to permanently bar her from Canada under Ottawa's state secrecy laws

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Once again, US whistleblower Chelsea Manning is standing up to defend basic democratic principles under attack by a capitalist government determined to conceal its actions from the public.

The Canadian government plans to argue that Manning should be permanently barred from entering the country at a hearing of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), scheduled for October 7. The government claims Manning is inadmissible to Canada on "grounds of serious criminality," citing Section 16(2) of the Security of Information Act of 1985, which makes it a crime to "communicate to a foreign entity or terrorist group information that the Government of Canada or a province is taking measures to safeguard... if harm to 'Canadian interests' results." Manning plans to mount a constitutional challenge to the Act, whatever the outcome of the IRB hearing.

In the upside-down world inhabited by Canadian government lawyers, "serious criminality" refers to Manning's "use of a computer" to expose the crimes of Canadian and US imperialism in Afghanistan, crimes which the Canadian state would prefer to keep hidden in the aftermath of the humiliating retreat from Kabul last month.

In 2010, Manning, who was working as a US military analyst, released hundreds of thousands of US military records and diplomatic cables from the Afghan and Iraq wars to the media organization WikiLeaks. These revelations include the infamous "Collateral Murder" video, recording the crew of a US helicopter gunship as it massacred a group of Iraqis while expressing their unrestrained bloodlust.

More than 250,000 diplomatic cables leaked by Manning exposed the inner workings of US and also Canadian imperialism. The material she shared, including reports of the murderous rampages of US soldiers, torture and massive corruption, exposed the Canadian government's claims that it was in Afghanistan to defend "human rights" and "democracy" to be a pack of lies. Manning's revelations, together with those of NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, also laid bare the global spying operations of the imperialist powers in which Canada, as a member of the US-led "Five Eyes" alliance, plays a key role.

For her "crimes," Manning was sentenced to 35 years in the maximum-security US military prison at Fort Leavenworth and subjected to conditions akin to torture for seven years, including solitary confinement. Her sentence was commuted by outgoing US President Barack Obama in 2017. Manning was subsequently twice re-imprisoned for more than a year as US authorities attempted to force her to testify in a secret Grand Jury case against the imprisoned WikiLeaks founder and journalist Julian Assange. Fines of $1000 per day were imposed on Manning to extort her compliance. Manning steadfastly refused to succumb to the pressure, stating, "Nothing will convince me to testify before this or any other Grand Jury." The torturous experience drove Manning to several suicide attempts, and she was released shortly thereafter.

In her constitutional challenge to Canada's Security of Information Act, Manning, a person of astounding political and personal courage, is once again acting on principle, defending fundamental democratic rights. Her case has implications not only for her own freedom of movement, which she is entirely justified in defending, but also for the practice of investigative journalism in Canada and around the world.

Manning's lawyers write, "Much of what the public knows today about the reality of the U.S. 'War on Terror' and the crimes perpetrated in Iraq and Afghanistan would have remained entirely secret were it not for Ms. Manning's act of whistleblowing. The respondent's actions are part of a long tradition of public interest whistleblowing, without which many crimes and abuses carried out by states and other powerful actors would never see the light of day."

The changing approach of the Canadian government to Manning's admissibility is, in contrast, of an entirely unprincipled and reactionary character.

Manning first attempted to enter Canada in 2017, and was refused after she told Canadian border officials about her conviction. They equated the crimes she was charged with under US law with "treason" under Canadian law, and refused her entry.

In 2018, Manning entered the country for a few days on a

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personal visit and to speak at a conference. A government assessment of Manning at the time stated that her revelations "were of a time and place, little real harm resulted." Following her return to the US, Canadian Border Services declared her inadmissible again after unnamed government officials intervened.

The upcoming October 7 immigration hearing was demanded by Manning herself. Canadian Border Services has held her file since 2018, refusing to send it on to the IRB for the legally mandated admissibility hearing. The agency also secretly changed its legal rationale for barring her from the country from "treason" to "breach of the Security of Information Act." This change of rationale was only exposed by an Access to Information Act request filed by her lawyers.

The attempt of Canada's Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government to paint Manning as some sort of nefarious "criminal" are both absurd and hypocritical. To billions of working people across the world, she is a hero. She is now employed by the tech start-up Nym Technologies, where she designs un-hackable software for private communications, using blockchain technology.

Manning is not the kind of immigrant for which Ottawa has made security exceptions in the past, or which it prioritizes in the present. In the aftermath of WWII, the Canadian state granted waivers at the Cabinet level permitting former Nazi scientists to enter Canada, and also former members of the Ukrainian "Galicia Division" of the Waffen SS. One of the principal architects of the Rwandan genocide, Leon Mugesera, was living at large in Canada for years before being deported. In August, the Canadian state scrambled to evacuate its thousands of Afghan war collaborators and yes-men from Kabul. This crowd no doubt included a number of professional fingernail pullers, along with the interpreters, secretaries and assistants with first-hand knowledge of Canada's actions in Afghanistan. The Canadian state is desperately trying to cover up its own crimes, so that new ones may be prepared.

Further, by using an extremely broad interpretation of the Security of Information Act, its ultimate target is not Manning, but the working class and the democratic rights won over centuries. As the crisis of world capitalism intensifies due to the social, economic and political consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Canadian ruling class grows ever more hostile to the very bourgeois democratic norms which served as a basis of its rule in an earlier period. Like every other capitalist government, in order to defend the profit system, its policies take on an ever more openly criminal and authoritarian character.

The government's new interpretation of the Security of Information Act is so broad that the reporting of virtually any fact could be criminalized if it embarrassed the government, or harmed some Canadian business or strategic interest. What would occur if some Ottawa official were to reveal embarrassing or incriminating statements made by Cabinet ministers about the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic? For example, the Canadian equivalent of Boris Johnson's "let the bodies pile high in their thousands!" admission.

The Canadian federal and provincial governments are responsible for a criminal policy of social murder in the form of the back-to-work and back-to-school campaigns, which have claimed up to 50,000 lives thus far. And as the Canadian military pulls out of Afghanistan, the Canadian state and its American and British allies are openly preparing for a global war against Russia and China.

The political sponsors of such policies are criminals. As the scale of their crimes grows, the criminals will be compelled more and more to keep their decisions and their actions a secret. In challenging the constitutionality of the Security of Information Act which the government is using to keep her from visiting Canada, Manning is defending the right of Canadian workers to know the truth about what the government is doing. That basic democratic principle, which is critical for developing a mass working class movement against imperialist war, is now seen as simply intolerable in ruling class circles.

There is not one public figure among the 338 politicians elected to parliament last Monday who comes close to comparing in political principles, personal bravery or integrity with Manning.

The New Democratic Party (NDP), which postures as a "left" party, has been silent on Manning's decade-long persecution, just as it has on that of Assange, who is being slowly tortured to death in Belmarsh Prison in England while the British and American governments attempt to concoct a phony pretext for his extradition to the United States.

The NDP, which waged an utterly fraudulent election campaign with appeals to "tax the rich," has supported every single Liberal government measure which enriches and empowers them. On questions of war and peace, the NDP has facilitated every Liberal government military spending increase, and calls on the Canadian state to "get tough on China." This political pillar of capitalism and imperialism will never lead a principled challenge to its increasingly criminal imperatives.

The Socialist Equality Party (Canada) condemns the Canadian government's use of the Security of Information Act to bar Manning. We demand she be freely allowed to travel and speak as she pleases. Workers and students who agree should contact us today and join in the fight for a socialist society, which requires the abolition of the artificial borders of the nation state system, and the free movement of working people and information.

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