

The Conviction of Bradley Manning: A Travesty of Justice

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The guilty verdict handed down Tuesday in the court-martial of whistle-blower Bradley Manning is a travesty of justice. The judge, Col. Denise Lind, found the 25-year-old Army private guilty of 19 of the 21 counts lodged against him, including five counts under the 1917 Espionage Act.

Manning faces a prison term of up to 136 years in the sentencing phase of the trial that begins today at Fort Meade, Maryland.

Manning's acquittal on the charge of "aiding the enemy," which carries a potential death sentence, reflects the awareness of the military and the Obama administration of the broad popular opposition to the proceedings against the young soldier. At the same time, it underscores the fraudulent character of the entire trial.

The prosecution denounced Manning as a "traitor" and charged him with aiding Al Qaeda and carrying out espionage even though there were no allegations that he handed over information to any foreign government or terrorist organization. Instead, in a sinister and unprecedented attempt to make the revealing of government secrets potentially a capital crime and undermine First Amendment guarantees of speech and press freedom, the government argued that any leaking of classified information constituted espionage because the information could be accessed by those deemed to be enemies.

As the government well knows, the "enemy" for whose benefit Manning courageously exposed proof of US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, was the American people.

Manning's conviction, particularly on espionage charges, establishes a reactionary precedent that will be used against whistle-blowers and journalists in the future.

Of all the revelations made by WikiLeaks on the basis of material supplied by Manning, the one that most infuriated Obama and the military was the video posted on YouTube in April 2010 showing the wanton and cold-blooded killing of unarmed civilians and reporters in Baghdad by an American helicopter gunship. That incident graphically summed up the criminal nature of the war.

The US ruling elite was all the more frightened that the broad opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was finding expression among a section of rank-and-file soldiers.

The response of the Obama administration was to imprison Manning for more than three years before any charges were laid, keeping him for much of that period in solitary

confinement and subjecting him to cruel and abusive conditions that were condemned by human rights organizations around the world as tantamount to torture.

The trial itself was a legal farce. It was a show trial aimed at intimidating popular opposition to the wars and further subordinating an already cowed press. It is largely because of the cowardice of the official media and its complicity in covering up government lies and crimes that individuals such as Manning and National Security Agency whistle-blower Edward Snowden have been compelled to sacrifice their freedom and jeopardize their lives to get the truth out to the public.

Manning's court-martial, in the final analysis, arises from Washington's launching of an illegal war of aggression against Iraq and the attempt of the government to conceal all of the crimes—torture at Abu Ghraib and other US prisons, the destruction of Fallujah and other Iraqi cities, the incitement of a sectarian civil war—that arose from that war.

Because the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were criminal enterprises, based on lies, none of the allegations against Manning, who sought to expose the criminal character of those wars, has any legal or moral substance.

Under the principles established by the Nuremberg Tribunal, which tried and convicted Nazi leaders after World War II, it should be Obama and other top US civilian and military leaders who are standing in the dock, rather than Manning. The chief prosecutor at Nuremberg, Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, insisted that the central crime committed by the defendants, and the source of all other crimes, was the preparation and waging of wars of aggression.

The Obama administration is guilty of this crime not only in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in Libya and Syria, and it is preparing further and even bloodier wars against regimes deemed to be obstacles to the geostrategic and financial interests of the American ruling class, including Iran and China.

In April of 2011, while Manning was languishing in prison, Obama said of the Army private: "We are a nation of laws. We don't let individuals make decisions about how the law operates. He broke the law."

Not only did this statement from the chief executive make a mockery of any claim to due process in the Manning case, it came from a president who has been caught shredding the US Constitution and the democratic rights guaranteed in its Bill of Rights. It is well known that Obama is presiding over a massive and illegal spying operation against the American people and millions more around the world, that he oversees a program of drone assassinations, including of American citizens, and sanctions the use of force-feeding and other forms of torture against detainees at Guantanamo and other US gulags.

The American president is engaged in the erection of the framework of a police state within the United States. The vindictive prosecution of Bradley Manning and the international witch-hunt against Edward Snowden and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange are bound up with the preparations for repression on a mass scale against social and political opposition.

The cause of freedom for those who are courageous and principled enough to challenge and bring to light government crimes and conspiracies against the democratic rights of the people must be taken up by the working class in the United States and around the world.

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