



SPECIAL REPORT

Bradley Manning, Wikileaks and the Case for Anarchism

Center for a Stateless Society
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Just over one year ago, US Army PFC Bradley Manning was arrested in Iraq on suspicion of having passed restricted information to WikiLeaks -- an international website dedicated to protecting the privacy of whistleblowers. He is currently imprisoned in a U.S. Army prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. If the facts of the charges against him are not true, an innocent man has already suffered a great deal from unjust imprisonment. If the facts of the charges against him are true, though, Manning would best be seen as a heroic whistleblower enduring political prosecution under mere color of law for sake of exposing government wrongdoing.

Anyone with an interest in government-accountability and the "rule of law", as the term is correctly understood, has an interest in Manning's case and speaking up on his behalf, regardless of their personal political point of view. The Manning case and, more broadly, Wikileaks has a special importance for anarchists, though.

The word "anarchism" may have some scary associations for some people, but it ought not to. It comes from roots that simply mean "no rulers". An anarchist opposes arbitrarily-imposed political authority. Instead, anarchists propose not chaos but a fully consensual social order with law emerging through binding agreements and neutral arbitration of disputes instead of being imposed in a top-down manner.

The modern political nation-state exercises a monopoly of law. Like all monopolies, economics dictates that it will have a strong tendency to be expensive, abusive and provide low-quality services. To abolish a monopoly is to open up peaceful competition. In order for such competition to emerge, a basic legal framework has to come about for settling disputes between service providers peacefully, comparable to international law today.

When you look closely at the Bradley Manning case, Wikileaks and the rise of their defenders such as the hacktivist group Anonymous, you can see the beginnings of the process by which that framework can emerge. By peacefully fighting for government accountability, people make the exercise of arbitrary authority progressively more and more difficult.

That is the anarchist project.

Welcome to the revolution.

Thank You, Bradley Manning, for Your Service

by Kevin Carson - Mar 9, 2011

I usually find myself overcome with nausea when some sycophant tells a uniformed soldier “Thank you for your service.” I’m perfectly willing to accept that some people joined the armed forces, in all sincerity, believing that the U.S. government’s wars have something to do with “defending our freedom.” And many of them have displayed extraordinary courage under fire, or taken heroic risks to defend their comrades’ lives, in that belief. But I feel no need to feed their delusion.

Nevertheless, on this occasion I feel compelled to say to Pfc. Bradley Manning: Thank you for your service.

The U.S. government, after months of holding Manning in solitary confinement in an unsuccessful attempt to break his soul and coerce him into implicating Julian Assange, has blanketed him with additional spurious charges in a further attempt to blackmail him. Among the charges are leaking information to “the enemy” (although they have not stated who “the enemy” is supposed to be in the absence of a legal declaration of war, and cannot name any American who has died as a result of the revelations). In addition, Manning’s jailers now require him to sleep naked and stand at attention naked outside his cell while his cell is searched every morning.

This, supposedly, is “for his safety,” in order to prevent him from harming himself — although he has not been placed on an actual suicide watch. Right — after holding a prisoner in solitary for months in a deliberate attempt to destroy his mind, the “helping professionals” of the U.S. military are treating his alleged suicidal tendencies with sexual humiliation. Let’s not forget: Sensory deprivation and forced nudity — far from being the work of “a few bad apples” — have been standard practices from Abu Ghraib to Guantanamo.

Get this: The official explanation for why Manning can’t put on his underwear before being turned out of his cell is that regulations require turning all prisoners out at the same time, and they’d have to wake him up early! And that would violate a double-secret unbreakable regulation! See, their hands are tied! Lt. Brian Villiard, spokesman for the Marine brig at Quantico, denies that these conditions are intended to “pressure or punish” Manning. Villiard is a liar.

Manning, who has never actually been convicted of anything, is being punished for one crime, and one crime alone: Embarrassing the United States government. He has exposed the criminal activities of that government — including war crimes by American troops — as well as criminal activities by foreign governments in collusion with the U.S. What’s more, he’s created a demonstration effect by showing others how easy it is to do, and forced government officials to work under the threat of exposure. Murdering civilians and pimping little boys to Afghan police officials is small potatoes. But embarrassing the U.S. government? For this Manning must die.

Bradley Manning, directly and indirectly, has probably done more for freedom than any single human being in years.

His exposure of war crimes by U.S. forces in Iraq, and of how the sausage of U.S. foreign policy is made, benefit freedom in their own right insofar as they undermine — to whatever extent — the global and domestic credibility of the United States government.

But more importantly, the cables Manning leaked — and which Wikileaks published — played a central role in triggering the so-called Twitter revolution that started in Tunisia, spread to Egypt and much of the Middle East, and is now striking Qaddafi with hurricane-force winds of freedom. Among those cables were detailed descriptions of the Tunisian regime’s corruption, which galvanized local dissident groups into launching the movement that overthrew the government.

Even in Egypt, where the revolution has seemingly come and gone, we find that Manning’s gift keeps on giving. Egyptian freedom-fighters, unwilling to meekly acquiesce in a somewhat less corrupt interim military dictatorship (however long “interim” is), have stormed State Security headquarters in Cairo, where secret police were busily shredding incriminating documents on orders from the Interior Ministry. The demonstrators themselves seized an indeterminate number of documents before being repelled by the army, and the army now claims to have sealed the building in order to preserve all documents from further destruction.

Among the documents seized by the demonstrators were many shelves of files on torture — documents previously available only to former secret police chief Omar Suleiman — some of which may reveal the identities of individuals in the Egyptian and U.S. governments involved in the extraordinary rendition program.

Think of it: Countless “Little Eichmanns” in the U.S. national security bureaucracy are lying awake nights, in fear that their complicity in outsourcing torture will be exposed to light of day.

Once again: Thank you, Bradley Manning, for your service.