

Whistleblower and former political prisoner Chelsea Manning speaks to WSWS

By Norisa Diaz
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The *World Socialist Web Site* sat down with Chelsea Manning last month to discuss state surveillance, the current political situation and the growing danger of world war.

Eight years ago, in May 2010, then 22-year-old Pvt. Manning was arrested and charged by the Army under the Obama administration for leaking internal military documents to WikiLeaks, including the video of a deadly Apache attack released in a video entitled “Collateral Murder.” The footage showed US Apache helicopters gunning down 12 civilians in East Baghdad, Iraq in July 2007. The dead included a Reuters reporter and his driver.

Manning leaked 250,000 diplomatic cables from American embassies, exposing official US “meddling” around the world, including efforts to subvert governments and dossiers on the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, revealing that most had no significant role in terrorist operations.

For these courageous actions, Manning was arrested and imprisoned under horrific conditions for seven years, including a year and a half in solitary confinement. In January 2017, her 35-year prison sentence was commuted by Obama, but she was not pardoned, and therefore her conviction still stands.

Manning announced earlier this year that she would run in the Democratic Party primaries for Maryland Senate in elections being held in June. She was in San Diego on April 9 and sat down for a discussion with representatives of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.

We began by asking Manning what she thought of the record of eight years of Obama, the Trump administration and the growing danger of world war.

“This is the direction that if you continue,” Manning replied, “regardless of whether it’s a Democrat or

Republican administration at a particular time, the systemic problems are still perpetuated, and they’re not really discussed or addressed.

“For instance, one administration will take the position that we need to go after ‘criminals’ or ‘illegals,’ or undocumented people or any different variation of class of people really aggressively. While another will come in and say, ‘Well, we want to make these systems more inclusive.’ It glosses over the systemic problems. They call for more women corrections officers, bigger women’s prisons, trans drone pilots is another good example. You know it’s like, ‘We want trans people to be involved in the bombing.’ So it’s a more diversified system of oppression. An equal opportunity oppression system.”

Throughout the interview, Manning criticized both Democrats and Republicans, though she herself is currently running as a candidate in Maryland in the Democratic Party primaries. She has called for an end to prisons and the abolition of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency.

She added: “As for Obama, I refer to it as ‘eight years of treading water,’ where he offered bailouts, concessions, and tax cuts. Underemployment is the stealth issue. I know people with masters’ degrees who are Uber drivers, and on top of it you have to pay your student loans.

“The Democratic Party is a perpetuation of the system. I don’t believe in a two-party system. If you look at the substance of both parties they are both so similar, the difference is in style. Ninety-five percent of the time they agree, and that 5 percent of the time they don’t it isn’t about something substantial but something that is the approach, or the optics of it.

“It is a symbiotic relationship. Both parties are friends, they talk to each other, a lot of media

discussion is merely for show. The political discourse in the media, and on Twitter is very much a controlled dog-and-pony show, where both sides are really trying to distract everyone.”

We noted the central role of the Democratic Party in the anti-Russia campaign and the campaign over “fake news,” which is being used to censor the Internet and crack down on individuals like Julian Assange.

On the claims of Russian interference in the US elections, Manning stated, “It’s not a new phenomenon. All states are doing this. We have been using these kinds of techniques over a century in other people’s elections and more aggressive techniques than information flooding.

“It was bad platform and policy positions that drove Clinton’s loss. We can’t depend on a news outlet or Twitter post to give us accurate information, we have to seek that for ourselves. I am not necessarily saying going to alternative news outlets, because they are not necessarily worthy of going to either. Be your own filter, seek out your own information.”

WSWS reporters explained that in April 2017 Google introduced new search algorithms and protocols that block access to socialist, anti-war, and progressive websites. The WSWS in particular was the hardest hit. In January 2018, Facebook implemented changes to its news feed to block access to news, specifically targeting left-wing sites.

“People in technology have tools and resources to address this,” Manning replied. “I work a lot with people in algorithms, people in AI development. There is not a deficit of awareness about these things, but I think there is a deficit of awareness that we in technology can do something about it.

“I’m trying to encourage people in technology to take a stand and say, ‘These algorithms can’t be built and maintained unless I build and maintain them.’ I’ve been encouraging people to look at the labor movement of the 19th and 20th centuries and look at the tactics that they used. I encourage people in technology in particular to address these problems.”

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