

Nobel Peace Prize to Bradley Manning?

As the Iraq War's architects and boosters remain respected figures in Official Washington, whistleblower Bradley Manning faces possible life in prison. To counter this injustice, media critic Jeff Cohen thinks Manning should get the Nobel Peace Prize, as he explained to Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

The grassroots activist group, RootsAction.org, has drafted a petition addressed to the Norwegian Nobel Committee calling for the Nobel Peace Prize to be awarded to imprisoned U.S. whistleblower, Pvt. Bradley Manning. According to RootsAction co-founder Jeff Cohen, the response to the petition has been swift and substantial. More than 30,000 people signed on in a matter of days.

Manning was arrested nearly three years ago on charges that he provided a large number of classified documents to the anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks.

In a recent interview on Pacifica's "Flashpoints," Cohen spoke with Dennis J. Bernstein about why RootsAction launched the petition drive as well as the failure of the mainstream press to report the story in an honest and meaningful way. Cohen is also the founding director of the Parks Center for Independent Media at Ithaca College.

DB: Why the Nobel Prize? What is relevant? Why does it connect up for you?

JC: Well, the prize as it was originally Intended by Alfred Nobel's will is supposed to go to the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, the abolition or reduction in standing armies. Bradley Manning has been an unbelievable whistleblower for the cause of peace.

He was an Army private; he saw all these documents that showed war crimes, [such as] the U.S. had an official order not to intervene when allies in Iraq were torturing people. The civilian [death] toll is documented, you know, the government has always told us they are not keeping track of civilians. But Bradley Manning released documents that show they are. We saw the videotape of Apache helicopter personnel almost seeming to enjoy the fact that people were being killed on the ground in Iraq. And it turned out to be civilians and at least one or two Reuter's journalists. So there's all this evidence of war crimes, of official misbehavior by both the U.S. Defense Department and the U.S. State Department.

And in the cause of peace, as originally intended by Alfred Nobel, there's a lot

of worthy candidates this year, but it hard to see anyone being more worthy than the guy who might be spending the rest of his life in prison for educating not only the U.S. public but the world about some of the atrocities that are happening in the so-called U.S. War on Terror.

DB: Now, the corporate press would have to accept some responsibility for the lack of knowledge and understanding of what Bradley Manning was doing. I remember very well how the corporate press participated in the release of certain WikiLeaks documents. Everybody went and studied and published. But all of a sudden, that operation, WikiLeaks and anything associated with it became persona non grata. You want to talk about the role the corporate media plays in misinforming the public on something like Bradley Manning and what that means?

JC: Well, there's no doubt that the U.S. mainstream media turned against WikiLeaks; did not defend WikiLeaks. You know, WikiLeaks is a publisher of these documents that they received from Bradley Manning, and from so many other whistleblowers inside governments or corporate world. And I think it reflects in the U.S. mainstream media how far we've declined since the Pentagon Papers. You know, in the Pentagon Papers in 1971, you had newspapers from the New York Times to the Washington Post to the Boston Globe basically engaging in civil disobedience against the Nixon administration.

As soon as one newspaper was stopped from publishing the Pentagon Papers, another newspaper started publishing. And these were highly classified documents from Daniel Ellsberg about the Vietnam War. Much higher classification than what Bradley Manning released.

So jump forward from 1971 to today and you find a U.S. mainstream media that seems uninterested in whistleblowers, unwilling to come to the defense of whistleblowers, and a media that seems to discuss how will the documents that Bradley Manning or WikiLeaks is releasing, how are these documents going to affect U.S. policy? It's more like how are the documents going to undermine the Establishment. than what a journalist should ask, which is "How did these documents shed light on what the government is doing in the name of the American people, that the American people need to know about?"

These documents showed that the U.S. State Department was aligned with the corporate interests in Haiti trying to stop a minimum wage in the poorest country in our hemisphere. That's news. That when there was a military coup in Honduras the U.S. State Department, the embassy there knew immediately this was an open and shut case. This is an illegal military coup d'etat against a democratic president. But that's not what they were saying out of Washington.

So, these are huge stories, they are being covered as big stories across the

globe, but as you said Dennis, in our mainstream media it's sort of a ho-hum attitude and with this young man, Bradley Manning, who is now 25 years old, looking at perhaps his life in prison. In fact, quite likely his life in prison, that's why I think, that people who know the true story of Bradley Manning have rushed to RootsAction.org. The signatures are exploding today.

Norman Solomon wrote a whole column with just comments from Americans who are getting the news about why Bradley Manning does deserve a peace prize, and the peace prize was originally intended to give some cash so these people who received the peace prize could continue working for peace. Well, Bradley Manning has a major, major law bill, legal defense bill. He needs help. And it's a long shot but if the Nobel committee ever gave a peace prize to Bradley Manning it would really say something to the U.S. war machine about where international opinion is moving on the so-called War on Terror.

DB: One of my favorite reporters, Jeff, is Amira Haas. She works for Ha'aretz and she reports from the West Bank, and she says the job of the media is to monitor the centers of power, whether they be in the government, in corporations, wherever it happens. But it does seem now that instead,... the media has become one of the centers of power, one of the buddy buddies, and they do appear to believe that their job is more as patriots than as reporters.

JC: There's no doubt, the higher you go up in the mainstream media, and I used to work in mainstream television, the more these people see themselves as part of the establishment. Editors of Newsweek have admitted, "We are part of the Establishment, that's how we see things. We don't want the boat rocked." And there's no doubt that as the media have become bigger and more corporate, there's less willingness to go out on a limb and question something that the two parties are doing together. That's the essence of the problem.

When the two parties agree on a military adventure like invading Iraq or trying to get some sort of confrontation going today with Iran, when the two parties are in alliance as they usually are on foreign policy – there's obviously a lot of fighting about domestic policy, but on foreign policy there's often a lot of alliance between the two parties – well, the mainstream media, the corporate media, basically is acting as parts of the Establishment, don't see an issue.

And anyone who does is obviously liberally biased or progressively biased. If you think there's a problem here with the thrust of the War on Terror, well you must be one of those people, those Pacifica-Bradley-Manning-WikiLeaks-type people. But we in the Establishment know that since the two parties aren't in an active fight about U.S. foreign policy, there's not a real story here.

DB: You know, Jeff, I used to do a lot of reporting, as you know, for the print

press, and as an investigative reporter working for some of the mainstream newspapers who actually at that time had some decent editors. I remember I worked for Les Payne at Newsday who got a Pulitzer prize for reporting on South Africa, there were some great people. And one of the things that meant a great deal to a journalist doing these hard stories was to get a document, because just an eyewitness' account could be questioned but if you have the document.

For instance, we were covering the first Gulf War. And we got a document that said that the public information part of the military was going to lie about the obvious exposure that vets would be exposed to chemistry during the first Gulf War because the U.S. knew it, because they sold the material to Iraq. We love those documents because you couldn't question. Yet, here [regarding Manning], the media laugh at the documents. It's almost as if they've been hoodwinked by giving a document that reveals a crucial story that the people need to know about.

JC: Yeah, I think you've touched on it. Because the journalists used to salivate over documentation and the people in power can't deny it's true. You've got the document, you've got someone in power talking to someone else in power. But instead of just wanting to grab onto these documents, there's been a sense in the mainstream media, "Oh, okay, this is problematic."

I think what the Bradley Manning, WikiLeaks documents show is the U.S. mainstream media have been asleep at the wheel the last decade. That's the point. If you've been in mainstream media, whether National Public Radio or whatever, to grab onto these documents now might make people question "Well, why weren't you on the story before?" I mean these documents show the U.S. leaning on democratic governments in Europe to prevent them from prosecuting CIA officials, CIA agents that engaged in kidnap and abetted torture. That's pretty serious.

These are huge stories in the German mainstream media, the Spanish mainstream media, the British mainstream media but these are largely stories about the U.S. war effort, the so-called War on Terror and they just haven't been that big a story in the country where the public really needs to know what is being done in our name.

DB: Now, there's certainly something else at play here in terms of corporate reporting because if on the one hand you have all these independent sort of internet-related journalists now putting out a story based on significant information the corporate press has a lot to lose, including their credibility, what's left of it, if here you've got this small outlet putting out crucial information. So the corporate press has to walk all over it. They have to pooh-pooh it. They have to make believe that these folks that are working in smaller

organizations are crazy and shouldn't be believed. Or they look really bad.

JC: There's no doubt about that. That a group like WikiLeaks – and I hope there will be many successors to WikiLeaks – has sort of abrogated, diminished the gate-keeping function of the mainstream media. And that's another resentment. A lot of small outfits have gone to town, and thank God for WikiLeaks as the original releaser, have gone to town on these documents.

And I think there's a sense, in the mainstream media, that they are losing their power; losing their ability to control what gets out to the public and what doesn't. And I just feel that you look at the evolution from Daniel Ellsberg in 1971 to Bradley Manning today and the different way that the New York Times and Washington Post oriented toward Ellsberg and the way they orient to Bradley Manning today, who was so mistreated in custody. It's really night and day.

And the good news, though, Dennis as you pointed out – and I remember your investigative reporting over the years, and when you were doing articles sometimes in Newsday actually – the real good news is that independent media are stronger than ever. As long as the Internet remains free and as long as there's community radio. Stories are getting out.

I think in the last ten years the corporate mainstream media has lost some of its clout. They've certainly lost credibility. The mainstream media was largely wrong about the invasion of Iraq, factually. It wasn't an ideological thing. They got the facts wrong. They missed the story of the financial meltdown on Wall Street. And there's a lot of people who don't trust the mainstream media anymore, that's a good thing.

And there's a lot of those people looking for independent outlets, alternative to the mainstream media. And that's a great thing. And as long as the Internet remains free, and that's a big if. And as long as community radio continues to exist and that depends on peoples' donations. Then independent media will continue to grow. And that's one of the few bright spots in our society, the growth of independent media and the decline of corporate mainstream media.

DB: Final question now, and it has to do with people often think that community media is National Public Radio. Big story in the news today is that Talk of the Nation with Neal Conan, a former Pacifica person who was a good reporter in New York, is being discontinued. I wasn't crazy about the show, but people are moaning because this is an in-depth program, in an in-depth network, and we were getting information where we wouldn't get anywhere else. But you wouldn't agree with that, would you?

JC: No. I've not been a big fan of National Public Radio's national

programs. They sometimes have some great local shows. But just think about the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, we were just referring to. Who was the NPR reporter that distinguished him or herself during that period? There weren't any.

DB: No, they were all quoting Judith Miller.

JC: Yeah. Right. The New York Times and NPR have always enjoyed a special relationship. Who was the [NPR] reporter who distinguished him or herself on Wall Street meltdown, and the housing crisis? They missed it. And I think NPR is very much, at the national news level, intimidated by right-wing forces and corporate forces. It's become like bland corporate centrist reporting. And there's very little investigative reporting because the right wing in Congress is always threatening to cut off their funds.

DB: And a lot of corporate sponsorship.

JC: Oh, no doubt...

DB: One of the most well-endowed stations here in the Bay area, KQED, does Chevron commercials.

JC: No doubt. No doubt. Again, it's a sad thing because in other countries the mainstream media is more vibrant because they have genuine public, insulated funding to genuine public broadcasting. And public broadcasting sets a tone for the rest of the commercial, more commercial, and more corporate media. We've never had that. We've always had weak public TV and public radio. The big media corporations have never allowed it to be genuinely public, they've always hemmed it in.

The National Association of Broadcasters has always been the main foe of public broadcasting. It has a huge audience. There's millions and millions of people. The news coverage, and I listen to it every single day, is so bland. If you place yourself between the two parties scrupulously and you believe you are on the 50-yard line, then you are not paying attention. If you put yourself between the elites of the Democratic and Republican parties, you may be somewhere between the 10- and 20-yard lines. But if you pretend that's mid-field, which is what gets done on NPR, it's not really solid reporting.

Solid reporting has to somehow, sometimes take itself out of Establishment group think and go outside of what the two major or three major political parties are in a society. And our public radio news, it seems to be imbedded inside the elites of the two-party system and rarely wanders outside of that. That's not helpful to the public.

DB: Alright, Jeff Cohen, how can people get more information about RootsAction and about what RootsAction is doing in the context of Bradley Manning and the Nobel prize.

JC: If people go to the home page which is simply www.RootsAction.org, you'll see it at the top of the page. You can sign that petition, the most important thing is send it to your friends. Forward that thing around. And we're having explosive growth. And feel free to add your comments, wonderful, and very warm comments from people that know the Bradley Manning story, respect the bravery. They've been making comments and those comments will also be delivered to the Nobel Peace Committee. We have weeks to do this, but I encourage people to start building the numbers today.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of [Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom](#). You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net. He can be contacted at dennisjberstein@gmail.com.

Co-Opting Another Human Rights Group

For decades, the U.S. government has worked to bend respected human rights groups to the goals of Official Washington, often by spreading around money and credentialing the easily co-opted. The strategy has touched groups like Amnesty International and now PEN, write John V. Walsh and Coleen Rowley.

By John V. Walsh and Coleen Rowley

Suzanne Nossel is a disturbing choice as the new executive director of [PEN](#), American Center, an American branch of the worldwide association of writers and related professions devoted to free expression and "the ideal of one humanity living [in peace](#) in the world." International PEN was founded in 1921 to act as a powerful voice for freedom of expression and in defense of writers facing harassment and jail.

Playwright [Arthur Miller](#), who once led PEN, said, "When *political people* have finished with repression and *violence* PEN can indeed be forgotten. Until then, with all its floundering and failings and mistaken acts, it is still, I think, a fellowship moved by the hope that one day the work it tries and often manages to do will no longer be necessary."

Nossel is an advocate for what she has termed "[Smart Power](#)," as she explained in

Foreign Affairs: “To advance from a nuanced dissent to a compelling vision, progressive policymakers should turn to the great mainstay of twentieth-century U.S. foreign policy: liberal internationalism (which) should offer assertive leadership, diplomatic, economic, *and not least, military*, to advance a broad array of goals.” (Emphases added)

The stark contrast between the statements of Arthur Miller and Suzanne Nossel is enough to sound an alarm. But Nossel’s career path, the masters she has served, the stances she has taken and the activities she has sponsored demonstrate profound differences with PEN, which cannot remain true to the ideals articulated by Arthur Miller with Nossel at the helm. She is an embodiment of the ongoing, and all too successful, cooption of the Human Rights movement by the U.S. government.

Nossel came to PEN after a year’s stint as Executive Director of Amnesty International, USA (AI), in 2012. Before that she served in Hillary Clinton’s State Department as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs. Let’s consider her time at AI first:

Nossel assumed her post as Executive Director of AI in January, 2012. Then in May when NATO held its “Summit Meeting” in Chicago, AI sponsored a “Shadow Summit” there. As part of this effort, AI mounted a campaign which employed bus stop billboards supporting the NATO invasion in the words, “NATO, Keep the Progress Going. Human Rights for Women and Girls in Afghanistan.”¹ “Bombing the women to save them” might well have been the slogan.

AI’s “Shadow Summit” featured a number of panels at a Chicago hotel with the main speaker at the first panel former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who famously observed to Leslie Stahl that the deaths of many hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, including an estimated 500,000 children, on her watch during the Clinton administration was a price “worth it” to weaken former U.S. ally, Saddam Hussein.

What was such a person doing at an AI event? The same panel featured other female luminaries from the U.S. foreign policy establishment, including Melanne Verveer, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues who was also a main speaker; U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Illinois; and Afifa Azim, General Director and Co-Founder, Afghan Women’s Network; along with Moderator Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, Deputy Director of AI.

Coleen Rowley and Anne Wright, who resigned from the State Department in 2003 to protest the war on Iraq, along with a handful of fellow antiwar activists attempted to attend the panel but were refused entrance until some in the group pointed out that they were members of AI.

AI then allowed the group to enter, but in an apparent lapse of concern for free speech only if signs opposing NATO's war on Afghanistan were left outside. Such is the forgetfulness that proximity to power breeds. In a written account of the panel entitled "Amnesty's Shilling for U.S. Wars," Rowley and Wright noted that the CIA's "Red Cell" in a report disclosed by Wikileaks, had recommended a strategy of using "women's rights" to sell the war in Afghanistan.

Rowley and Wright continued: "When we saw that audience participation was going to be limited to questions selected from the small note cards being collected, we departed. We noted, even in that short time, however, how easy it was for these U.S. government officials to use the 'good and necessary cause' of women's rights to get the audience into the palm of their collective hand, just as the CIA's 'strategic communication' expert predicted!"

One has to ask what is afoot when a former State Department official takes over an organization like AI, which then neatly fits its approach into that of the U.S. government.

A few months after the appearance of the Rowley/Wright piece and complaints by other members and donors of AI, Nossel resigned unceremoniously. A call to AI's national office unearthed the reply from a staff member that the "staff had been told" that Nossel had resigned "for personal reasons." The promise of a return call by someone more knowledgeable did not materialize. Who was responsible, on or off the board, for hiring Nossel in the first place remains a mystery.

The Revolving Door

Nossel is often credited with coining the phrase "Smart Power,"² which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton repeated interminably in her Senate confirmation hearings to characterize how she would run State. Nossel defined the term in a 2004 article in *Foreign Affairs* as "assertive leadership, diplomatic, economic, and not least, military."

What was this smartly powered State Department like into which Nossel was hired? Perhaps Ralph Nader has taken the measure of it most perceptively, in a CounterPunch essay entitled "Hillary's Bloody Legacy: Militarizing the State Department":

"Behind the public relations sheen, the photo-opportunities with groups of poor people in the developing world, an ever more militarized State Department operated under Clinton's leadership. A militarized State Department is more than a repudiation of the Department's basic charter of 1789, for the then-named Department of Foreign Affairs, which envisioned diplomacy as its mission.

"Secretary Clinton reveled in tough, belligerent talk and action on her many

trips to more than a hundred countries. She would warn or threaten 'consequences' on a regular basis. She supported soldiers in Afghanistan, the use of secret Special Forces in other places and 'force projection' in East Asia to contain China. She aggressively supported or attacked resistance movements in dictatorships, depending on whether a regime played to Washington's tune.

"Because Defense Secretary Robert Gates was openly cool to the drum beats for war on Libya, Clinton took over and choreographed the NATO ouster of the dictator, Muammar al-Gaddafi, long after he had given up his mass destruction weaponry and was working to re-ignite relations with the U.S. government and global energy corporations. Libya is now in a disastrous warlord state-of-chaos. Many fleeing fighters have moved into Mali, making that vast country into another battlefield drawing U.S. involvement. Blowback!"

Thus did Nossel's strategy of "Smart Power" play out as she worked at the side of Clinton.

Before working at State, Nossel worked at Human Rights Watch, which has come under increasing criticism for its distorted accounts of the Chavez government in Venezuela and other official enemies of the U.S. And before that she worked at the UN under Richard Holbrooke as the Clintons masterminded the bombing of Yugoslavia and pushed NATO eastward in violation of assurances given by Ronald Reagan to Mikhail Gorbachev.

Here we behold a revolving door between government and human rights NGOs, much like the one connecting the Pentagon and defense contractors or between regulatory agencies and the corporate entities they are to regulate.

Nossel is clearly aware of the use that the U.S. government can make of organizations like PEN, writing in her 2004 "Smart Power" essay that "the United States' own hand is not always its best tool: U.S. interests are furthered by enlisting others on behalf of U.S. goals."

In what sense can PEN claim to be a "non-governmental organization" with Nossel in charge? In what sense can PEN claim to protect writers from the state with someone in charge who has been a frequent and unapologetic presence in the corridors of power?

Subversion of Human Rights

For many decades the rhetoric of human rights has been used by the West to justify its aggressive actions around the world. James Peck in his superb and much neglected work, *Ideal Illusions: How the U.S. Government Co-Opted Human Rights*, painstakingly and meticulously documents such subversion over the past 50 years.

But the subversion goes farther than the selective attention often paid to official enemies and the relative neglect of human rights violations by U.S. allies. He also points out that the concept of human rights that has prevailed in the West over this period is a shriveled one, basically confined to civil rights.

Although the mainstream human rights movement in the West claims to take its inspiration from the UN Declaration of Human Rights, it rarely mentions Articles 25 and 26, among others, which affirm health care and education as rights. Thus the fact that Gaddafi's Libya had the highest literacy rate or highest score in all of Africa on the UN's Human Development Index counted for nothing in assessments of Gaddafi. Nor is faintest praise to be found for the many hundreds of millions lifted from poverty and made literate in New China.

Similarly, Jean Bricmont in his insightful, Humanitarian Imperialism, another book studiously avoided by "progressives" in the West, details the use of human rights rhetoric to gain the support of European intellectuals for the Clintons' assault on the Balkans. This in fact marked a turning point in the view of intellectuals toward the wars of present day imperial powers on weaker nations, a view that set the stage for assaults on Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya and now Syria.

It marked a sharp break with the opposition of intellectuals to the U.S. war on Vietnam. The important principle of sovereignty enshrined in international law to protect weak nations from falling prey to powerful ones was rudely tossed aside, with much talk of human rights as the justification.

PEN Ignores Julian Assange and Bradley Manning

The principle at work here is not new. Julien Benda raised it long ago in The Treason of the Intellectuals. As Benda said, "There are two sets of principles. They are the principles of power and privilege and the principles of truth and justice. If you pursue truth and justice it will always mean a diminution of power and privilege. If you pursue power and privilege it will always be at the expense of truth and justice."

In our time we may identify Noam Chomsky and the late Alexander Cockburn among those who follow in the tradition of Benda. They represent the best in the tradition of PEN.

The question is which way will PEN go the way of Benda or continue along the way of Nossel. Today a search on the PEN, America, web site readily yields entries for Pussy Riot, Ai Weiwei, and Liu Xiaobo, but nothing is to be found for "Bradley Manning" or "Julian Assange"! That in itself speaks volumes about

Nossel's PEN.

As Chomsky and others have often pointed out, the primary duty of intellectuals is to critique their own ruling elite. After all, we can most affect our own rulers and it is their actions we are most responsible for. And that is what requires genuine courage. Criticizing elites in countries that are America's official enemies is an easy and secure career path.

For those who are appalled by what is happening at PEN, here are links to a list of current and newly elected officers and trustees. They bear ultimate responsibility for the path that PEN is taking and for Suzanne Nossel's employ. The issue can also be raised at the upcoming PEN World Voices events in New York City.

Former New York Times correspondent (and Truthdig columnist) Chris Hedges, who was scheduled to speak at the PEN events, resigned his membership in the writers' organization in protest of Nossel's appointment. It is clear that many speakers at these events, perhaps the overwhelming majority, hold views quite the opposite of Nossel's, as well they should. Nossel should resign.

Speaking out in cases like this is the only way to prevent the Empire from corrupting all it touches, including the human rights movement.

John V. Walsh, lately become an associate member of PEN, is a biophysicist/neuroscientist living in the Boston and area and a contributor to *DissidentVoice.org*, *CounterPunch.org*, and *Antiwar.com*. Coleen Rowley, now an antiwar activist in the Twin Cities area, is a former FBI special agent and legal counsel in the Minneapolis field office, who wrote a "whistleblower" memo in May 2002 and testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee about some of the FBI's pre-9/11 failures. [A version of this article earlier appeared at <http://dissidentvoice.org/2013/04/u-s-cooption-of-the-human-rights-movement-continues/#more-48267>]

1. The poster can be seen here. [â†©]
 2. Although Nossel is often credited with the term "Smart Power," from the title of her article in *Foreign Affairs* in 2004, Joseph Nye, Dean emeritus of Harvard's Kennedy School of government and another Pentagon and State Department functionary over the decades when not slaving in the fields of academe, published a book in 2003 with the title, *Smart Power*. [â†©]
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