**The Revolutionaries in Our Midst**

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By Chris Hedges

NEW YORK—Jeremy Hammond sat in New York’s Metropolitan Correctional Center last week in a small room reserved for visits from attorneys. He was wearing an oversized prison jumpsuit. The brown hair of the lanky 6-footer fell over his ears, and he had a wispy beard. He spoke with the intensity and clarity one would expect from one of the nation’s most important political prisoners.

On Friday the [28-year-old activist](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/28/jeremy-hammond-anonymous-hacker-guilty-stratfor_n_3347215.html) will appear for sentencing in the Southern District Court of New York in Manhattan. After having made a plea agreement, he faces the possibility of a 10-year sentence for hacking into the Texas-based private security firm Strategic Forecasting Inc., or Stratfor, which does work for the Homeland Security Department, the Marine Corps, the Defense Intelligence Agency and numerous corporations including Dow Chemical and Raytheon.

Four others involved in the hacking have been convicted in Britain, and they were sentenced to less time *combined*—the longest sentence was 32 months—than the potential 120-month sentence that lies before Hammond.

Hammond turned the pilfered information over to the website WikiLeaks and [Rolling Stone](http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/the-rise-and-fall-of-jeremy-hammond-enemy-of-the-state-20121207%20) and other publications. The 3 million email exchanges, once made public, exposed the private security firm’s infiltration, monitoring and surveillance of protesters and dissidents, especially in the Occupy movement, on behalf of corporations and the national security state. And, perhaps most important, the information provided chilling evidence that anti-terrorism laws are being routinely used by the federal government to criminalize nonviolent, democratic dissent and falsely link dissidents to international terrorist organizations. Hammond sought no financial gain. He got none.

The email exchanges Hammond made public were entered as evidence in [my lawsuit](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_last_chance_to_stop_the_ndaa_20130902%20) against President Barack Obama over Section 1021 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Section 1021 permits the military to seize citizens who are deemed by the state to be terrorists, strip them of due process and hold them indefinitely in military facilities. Alexa O’Brien, a content strategist and journalist who co-founded US Day of Rage, an organization created to reform the election process, was one of my co-plaintiffs. Stratfor officials attempted, we know because of the Hammond leaks, to falsely link her and her organization to Islamic radicals and websites as well as to jihadist ideology, putting her at risk of detention under the new law. Judge Katherine B. Forrest ruled, in part because of the leak, that we plaintiffs had a credible fear, and she nullified the law, a decision that an appellate court overturned when the Obama administration appealed it.

Freedom of the press and legal protection for those who expose government abuses and lies have been obliterated by the corporate state. The resulting self-exile of investigative journalists such as [Glenn Greenwald](http://www.advocate.com/print-issue/current-issue/2013/10/24/enemy-state%20), [Jacob Appelbaum](http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/jacob-appelbaum-utopia-interview%20) and [Laura Poitras](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/18/magazine/laura-poitras-snowden.html%20), along with the indictment of [Barrett Brown](http://freebarrettbrown.org ), illustrate this. All acts of resistance—including nonviolent protest—have been conflated by the corporate state with terrorism. The mainstream, commercial press has been emasculated through the Obama administration’s repeated use of the Espionage Act to charge and sentence traditional whistle-blowers. Governmental officials with a conscience are too frightened to reach out to mainstream reporters, knowing that the authorities’ wholesale capturing and storing of electronic forms of communication make them easily identifiable. Elected officials and the courts no longer impose restraint or practice oversight. The last line of defense lies with those such as Hammond, Julian Assange, Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning who are capable of burrowing into the records of the security and surveillance state and have the courage to pass them on to the public. But the price of resistance is high.

“In these times of secrecy and abuse of power there is only one solution—transparency,” wrote [Sarah Harrison](http://www.dw.de/sarah-harrison-ally-of-ex-nsa-contractor-snowden-in-germany/a-17211444), the British journalist who accompanied Snowden to Russia and who also has gone into exile, in Berlin. “If our governments are so compromised that they will not tell us the truth, then we must step forward to grasp it. Provided with the unequivocal proof of primary source documents people can fight back. If our governments will not give this information to us, then we must take it for ourselves.”

“When whistleblowers come forward we need to fight for them, so others will be encouraged,” she went on. “When they are gagged, we must be their voice. When they are hunted, we must be their shield. When they are locked away, we must free them. Giving us the truth is not a crime. This is our data, our information, our history. We must fight to own it. Courage is contagious.”

Hammond knows this contagion. He was living at home in Chicago in 2010 under a 7-a.m.-to-7-p.m. curfew for a variety of acts of civil disobedience when Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning was arrested for giving WikiLeaks secret information about military war crimes and government lies. Hammond at the time was running social aid programs to feed the hungry and send books to prisoners. He had, like Manning, displayed a remarkable aptitude for science, math and computer languages at a young age. He hacked into the computers at a local Apple store at 16. He hacked into the computer science department’s website at the University of Illinois-Chicago as a freshman, a prank that saw the university refuse to allow him to return for his sophomore year. He was an early backer of “cyber-liberation” and in 2004 started an “electronic-disobedience journal” he named Hack This Zine. He called on hackers in a speech at the 2004 DefCon convention in Las Vegas to use their skills to disrupt that year’s Republican National Convention. He was, by the time of his 2012 arrest, one of the shadowy stars of the hacktivist underground, dominated by groups such as Anonymous and WikiLeaks in which anonymity, stringent security and frequent changes of aliases alone ensured success and survival. Manning’s courage prompted Hammond to his own act of cyber civil disobedience, although he knew his chances of being caught were high.

“I saw what Chelsea Manning did,” Hammond said when we spoke last Wednesday, seated at a metal table. “Through her hacking she became a contender, a world changer. She took tremendous risks to show the ugly truth about war. I asked myself, if she could make that risk shouldn’t I make that risk? Wasn’t it wrong to sit comfortably by, working on the websites of Food Not Bombs, while I had the skills to do something similar? I too could make a difference. It was her courage that prompted me to act.”

Hammond—who has black-inked tattoos on each forearm, one the open-source movement’s symbol known as [the “glider”](http://www.catb.org/hacker-emblem/) and the other [the *shi* hexagram](http://www.iching123.com/7_text.htm%20) from the I Ching—is steeped in radical thought. As a teenager, he swiftly migrated politically from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party to the militancy of the [Black Bloc](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_cancer_of_occupy_20120206%20) anarchists. He was an avid reader in high school of material put out by [CrimethInc](http://www.crimethinc.com), an anarchist collective that publishes anarchist literature and manifestos. He has molded himself after old radicals such as Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman and black revolutionaries such as George Jackson, Elaine Brown and Assata Shakur, as well as members of the Weather Underground. He said that while he was in Chicago he made numerous trips to Waldheim Cemetery to visit the [Haymarket Martyrs Monument](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Haymarket_Martyr%27s_Memorial.jpg%20), which honors four anarchists who were hanged in 1887 and others who took part in the labor wars. On the 16-foot-high granite monument are the final words of one of the condemned men, August Spies. It reads: “The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voice you are throttling today.” Emma Goldman is buried nearby.

Hammond became well known to the government for a variety of acts of civil disobedience over the last decade. These ranged from painting anti-war graffiti on Chicago walls to protesting at the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York to hacking into the right-wing website Protest Warrior, for which he was sentenced to two years in the Federal Correctional Institute at Greenville, Ill.

He said he is fighting as “an anarchist communist” against “centralized state authority” and “exploitative corporations.” His goal is to build “leaderless collectives based on free association, consensus, mutual aid, self-sufficiency and harmony with the environment.” It is essential, he said, that all of us work to cut our personal ties with capitalism and engage in “mass organizing of protests, strikes and boycotts.” Hacking and leaking, he said, are part of this resistance—“effective tools to reveal ugly truths of the system.”

Hammond spent months within the Occupy movement in Chicago. He embraced its “leaderless, non-hierarchical structures such as general assemblies and consensus, and occupying public spaces.” But he was highly critical of what he said were the “vague politics” in Occupy that allowed it to include followers of the libertarian Ron Paul, some in the tea party, as well as “reformist liberals and Democrats.” Hammond said he was not interested in any movement that “only wanted a ‘nicer’ form of capitalism and favored legal reforms, not revolution.” He remains rooted in the ethos of the Black Bloc.

“Being incarcerated has really opened my eyes to the reality of the criminal justice system,” he said, “that it is not a criminal justice system about public safety or rehabilitation, but reaping profits through mass incarceration. There are two kinds of justice—one for the rich and the powerful who get away with the big crimes, then for everyone else, especially people of color and the impoverished. There is no such thing as a fair trial. In over 80 percent of the cases people are pressured to plea out instead of exercising their right to trial, under the threat of lengthier sentences. I believe no satisfactory reforms are possible. We need to close all prisons and release everybody unconditionally.”

He said he hoped his act of resistance would encourage others, just as Manning’s courage had inspired him. He said activists should “know and accept the worst possible repercussion” before carrying out an action and should be “aware of mass counterintelligence/surveillance operations targeting our movements.” An informant posing as a comrade, [Hector Xavier Monsegur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hector_Xavier_Monsegur%20), known online as “Sabu,” turned Hammond and his co-defendants in to the FBI. Monsegur stored data retrieved by Hammond on an external server in New York. This tenuous New York connection allowed the government to try Hammond in New York for hacking from his home in Chicago into a private security firm based in Texas. New York is the center of the government’s probes into cyber-warfare; it is where federal authorities apparently wanted Hammond to be investigated and charged.

Hammond said he will continue to resist from within prison. A series of minor infractions, as well as testing positive with other prisoners on his tier for marijuana that had been smuggled into the facility, has resulted in his losing social visits for the next two years and spending “time in the box [solitary confinement].” He is allowed to see journalists, but my request to interview him took two months to be approved. He said prison involves “a lot of boredom.” He plays chess, teaches guitar and helps other prisoners study for their GED. When I saw him, he was working on the statement, a personal manifesto, that he will read in court this week.

He insisted he did not see himself as different from prisoners, especially poor prisoners of color, who are in for common crimes, especially drug-related crimes. He said most inmates are political prisoners, caged unjustly by a system of totalitarian capitalism that has snuffed out basic opportunities for democratic dissent and economic survival.

“The majority of people in prison did what they had to do to survive,” he said. “Most were poor. They got caught up in the war on drugs, which is how you make money if you are poor. The real reason they get locked in prison for so long is so corporations can continue to make big profits. It is not about justice. I do not draw distinctions between us.”

“Jail is essentially enduring harassment and dehumanizing conditions with frequent lockdowns and shakedowns,” he said. “You have to constantly fight for respect from the guards, sometimes getting yourself thrown in the box. However, I will not change the way I live because I am locked up. I will continue to be defiant, agitating and organizing whenever possible.”

He said resistance must be a way of life. He intends to return to community organizing when he is released, although he said he will work to stay out of prison. “The truth,” he said, “will always come out.” He cautioned activists to be hyper-vigilant and aware that “one mistake can be permanent.” But he added, “Don’t let paranoia or fear deter you from activism. Do the down thing!”



AP/Cook County Sheriff's Office

Jeremy Hammond in a March 2012 booking photo from the Cook County Sheriff’s Office in Chicago.

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