

Cynthia McKinney On Leadership

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Global Research, October 02, 2012
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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Those who have followed the Republican campaign for the presidential nomination and current contest between Romney and Obama know that the United States has no political leadership in Washington.

Billions of dollars have been spent on political propaganda, but not a single important issue has been addressed. The closest the campaign has come to a political issue is which candidate can grovel the lowest at the feet of Israeli prime minister Netanyahu. Romney won that contest. But for the rest, well, it is like two elementary school children sticking their tongues out at one another.

The question of US political leadership has been on my mind for some time. I can remember when political leadership still existed and when bipartisan cooperation could be mustered on enough issues to keep the country and the government functioning.

But no more. It might have been Newt Gingrich who, as Speaker of the House, destroyed bipartisan cooperation by making war on the Democratic Party, warfare that Karl Rove has taken to a new height.

When a country loses leadership, how does a country get leadership back? This is an important question. Without leadership, there is only violence. Once the Romans lost their republic, there was no one to lead them and they were ruled by violence. Will this be our fate?

These thoughts were in my mind when I happened to hear Cynthia McKinney speak. Here was a leader, a person with sufficient fire, knowledge, and compassion for others. Cynthia McKinney served six terms in the House of Representatives as a Democrat from Georgia. In 2008 she was the Green Party's candidate for president. As a US Representative, Cynthia McKinney defied the cowardly Nancy Pelosi and introduced articles of impeachment against President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

If there had been any leadership in Congress in addition to that of Cynthia McKinney and Dennis Kucinich, the executive branch criminals who violated US law, international law, the US Constitution, and committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, would have been impeached, and today American citizens would be safe in their civil liberties protected by the US Constitution.

But as McKinney and Kucinich stood alone in their leadership, the Constitution is eviscerated and the executive branch is above the law. The US government now routinely commits war crimes and violates all of the traditional, but no longer extant, rights of US citizens.

Cynthia McKinney survived brickbats, but she did not survive the Israel Lobby. She spoke up

for the Palestinians, a taboo in American politics, and Israeli money got her evicted from the House of Representatives.

Recently, I had an opportunity to speak with Cynthia McKinney, and I asked her about leadership. She replied that at the local level in the black communities there is leadership. It no longer gets media coverage, but it is there.

At the elected political level, she said the public confuses leadership with election to office. But many elected politicians are sycophants for the powers who control the existing order. Real leaders are those with the courage to dissent and to resist. It is the act of resistance that transforms an elected person into a leader.

What Cynthia McKinney was telling me is that politics is a virtual reality, full of paper cutout props, pretending to be leaders, while the few real leaders are demonized, redistricted, and disposed of. McKinney, who was brave enough to take on all the forces of evil, also took on Israel for its crimes against the Palestinians.

This shamed almost every other member of Congress, both House and Senate, cowards who sit silently while Israel oppresses the Palestinians and steals their land. McKinney's moral conscience resulted in the Israel Lobby putting her on the extermination list. McKinney's constituents had not seen a leader in so long that they were unable to recognize one, and the Israel Lobby got away with it. She told me: "The Anti-Defamation League wanted me out of Congress and filed an amicus brief in the Supreme Court case to dismantle the District that sent me to Washington, D.C."

From the Washington Establishment's point of view, Cynthia McKinney was extremely dangerous. She spoke for the people, not for the monied interest groups. In Washington, this is impermissible behavior. And on top of it all, she challenged the government's official story about 9/11.

I remember when black Americans had stepped up to the demands of leadership. In the 21st century this leadership has disappeared. I asked Cynthia McKinney if the black leadership had been bought off with corporate directorships, speaking fees, and executive branch appointments, or was it simply no longer reported by the concentrated corporate ownership of the media, which serves only Washington. In her reply she differentiated between "positional authority" and leadership:

"This is a very good question. Glen Ford now calls them the "misleadership class" because what is being provided by those with positional authority is not leadership. it is the opposite of leadership. Leadership is not about positional authority or media acceptance: it is about what one does and who one serves and the vision, sense of mission, one inspires in others. Going along to get along and sycophancy in abandonment of one's professed values are not leadership. Individuals paraded on "mainstream" television and radio are not leaders. These are people who have accommodated themselves to the objectives of the current power wielders and shapers of US policy. The father of a close friend of mine described them as blacks who have sold their blackness.'

I asked Cynthia McKinney where are the real leaders as contrasted with the politically ambitious, how are they produced? Why are there so few? Why are they cast aside? Here are her answers:

This is an interesting question because there has raged a debate for quite some time now on whether leaders are born or made. I happen to believe that all of us have the stuff to be leaders, but it is the extent to which and how we use the stuff we have that determines the character of our leadership. Some people choose to not use their stuff at all and remain bystanders in the face of injustice. Other people choose to use their stuff in service to injustice as perpetrators. And then there's the rest of us who have a moral impulsion to speak up when we see wrong; in fact, Teddy Kennedy said it best when eulogizing his brother, Bobby: "He saw wrong and tried to right it; he saw suffering and tried to heal it. Saw war and tried to stop it." That's leadership. This country has had authentic, servant leaders on the national level and many of them were targeted for assassination by the State. This country has a deep reservoir of such capable leaders today, but the system as it is currently configured smothers them, making it difficult for them to breathe. We need to change this system and I believe that the people of this country still can change it.

Why are there so few leaders?

They see what happens to people like me who stand up. Greg Palast says in American Blackout that after I spoke up on the inconsistencies of the Bush Administration story on 9/11/01, I was lynched as a signal to what would happen to others if they dared ask questions and follow me. I'm still swinging from that poplar tree that he mentioned. Who would walk down that path except the bravest hearts?

Why are they cast aside?

We have an increasingly authoritarian structure that countenances no dissent. The only thing is that we, the people, don't know who really operates the structures. The ones we elect to represent us provide no leadership and tell us no truths. Their names appear on the ballot, but they are not the ones in charge calling the shots. Everything has become a joke that is not even funny. The repercussions for those of us who try and inject love, vision, compassion and common sense into the political discourse are quickly discredited, chewed up, and expectorated. Only those with the biggest hearts will take this path. Now, why are people like me cast aside? Because we know that we can win this titanic struggle. We know that the people can overcome this tyranny. We know that the true power lies with the people and that we are the majority. That's why the others have to work so hard with their propaganda, psychological operations, disinformation, and mind control tactics. Heaven forbid if the people would actually turn off the television and think. There would be a revolution tomorrow. And the rest of the world could finally live in peace and Mother Earth could reclaim her dignity. All of that depends on the voters of the United States to accept their responsibility to change the policies in Washington, DC, that are killing hope here and killing people abroad.

I asked Cynthia McKinney why people acquiesce to the casting aside of their leaders.

Her reply:

Bob Marley sang, "How long shall they kill our prophets while we stand aside and look?" I wish I could answer that question. I am not one who has accepted injustice quietly. I don't understand the bystander mentality. Election fraud right inside the Democratic Convention on two platform issues and there was no press conference of complaint, no protest, no sit-in, no nothing. The meeting is gavelled adjourned and the people are just left staring. Had I been there, of course, I would have done more than stare. In a room

of 20,000 people, where were the leaders? The good news is that new leaders are being made every day. With the excesses of the State, more and more people are waking up. And I am glad to reach out to Independents, Republicans, Democrats, Constitutionalists, and every political stripe in-between to find some common ground so we can advance on that ground together. It's crazy that the Department of Homeland Security is going to tell me who I should fear and not talk to. As a Southerner, I know that people can come together; I know that people can hear and listen and adapt to each other if someone is willing to start the conversation. As the values of the policy makers become more and more distant from those on whose behalf policy is made, we have no choice but to come together and save each other from the growing threat of our own elected officials quietly ripping the Bill of Rights to shreds.

I asked McKinney why some Americans can recognize a leader and others cannot:

Leadership, it seems, frightens some people. It holds them up to a standard that they could never attain. And they know it. Therefore, that's something better ignored. When one person sacrifices for you and you have rationalized away the need to sacrifice for anyone or any principle other than yourself, you've set a pretty low standard for humanity. On the other hand, persons who stand on conviction, and suffer the slings and arrows that come with that, evoke awe in some.

I asked Cynthia McKinney why President Obama had deserted the leadership role bestowed upon him by the American people and instead had fallen into the agenda of the Bush/Cheney/neoconservative Republicans. She replied that:

the policy of killing that is being carried out by President Obama has wiped out all of the moral credit that Black America accrued over their years of resistance to slavery, Jim Crow, racism, poverty, and militarism. The world understood that Black Americans had a different set of values. That they were against wars, against interference in the affairs of other countries, against imperialism, against colonialism, and against White Supremacy. Now, too many Black Americans cheer a President who defends targeted assassination, drone wars in Africa and elsewhere around the world, boots on the ground globally for the military-industrial-complex, and even torture. Sadly, now much of Black America has chosen to abdicate its moral responsibility and spend whatever moral credit they have earned globally in support of an African descendant President who has ripped to shreds the Bill of Rights, damaged life for tens of thousands of innocent individuals here and abroad hurt by the policies of this Administration, not to mention those who have been killed and will be deformed due to the massive depleted uranium being used.

I asked Cynthia McKinney if Washington's doctrine that "might makes right" would bring "freedom and democracy" to the world. She replied that:

The military might of the US is being used to benefit a very small group of men and women who have the rest of humankind hoodwinked as to the true nature of what is going on. The rest of humankind can't imagine that amount of greed and willingness to kill and so, are easily fooled and tricked by the individuals who control the new system that is being created. It is, sadly, a case of "willful blindness."

McKinney, an extremely realistic and well-informed person, unlike anyone in Washington or the media, remains confident that truth and justice will prevail. Her final words were:

We don't have to go very far to find the authentic leadership that this country needs at this very moment. The leaders we need already walk among us. In the Black and Brown communities, we have always had tremendous leaders who give their all for dignity and justice. I see them every day. They are ubiquitous around us. Given the right context, they will thrive and they will help us to thrive. What we must do is create the environment that will allow them to find their voice and thrive in positions of authority.

All of us must work to create the environment in which decent, compassionate people can become our leaders. America and the Constitution will be safe the day Cynthia McKinney or a similar person is president of the United States. Until then, we are in great peril.

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