

Is America 'Yearning for Fascism'?

By [Chris Hedges](#)

Global Research, April 11, 2010

[Truthdig](#) 29 March 2010

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

The language of violence always presages violence. I watched it in war after war from Latin America to the Balkans. The impoverishment of a working class and the snuffing out of hope and opportunity always produce angry mobs ready to kill and be killed. A bankrupt, liberal elite, which proves ineffectual against the rich and the criminal, always gets swept aside, in times of economic collapse, before thugs and demagogues emerge to play to the passions of the crowd. I have seen this drama. I know each act. I know how it ends. I have heard it in other tongues in other lands. I recognize the same stock characters, the buffoons, charlatans and fools, the same confused crowds and the same impotent and despised liberal class that deserves the hatred it engenders.

"We are ruled not by two parties but one party," Cynthia McKinney, who ran for president on the Green Party ticket, told me. "It is the party of money and war. Our country has been hijacked. And we have to take the country away from those who have hijacked it. The only question now is whose revolution gets funded."

The Democrats and their liberal apologists are so oblivious to the profound personal and economic despair sweeping through this country that they think offering unemployed people the right to keep their unemployed children on their nonexistent health care policies is a step forward. They think that passing a jobs bill that will give tax credits to corporations is a rational response to an unemployment rate that is, in real terms, close to 20 percent. They think that making ordinary Americans, one in eight of whom depends on food stamps to eat, fork over trillions in taxpayer dollars to pay for the crimes of Wall Street and war is acceptable. They think that the refusal to save the estimated 2.4 million people who will be forced out of their homes by foreclosure this year is justified by the bloodless language of fiscal austerity. The message is clear. Laws do not apply to the power elite. Our government does not work. And the longer we stand by and do nothing, the longer we refuse to embrace and recognize the legitimate rage of the working class, the faster we will see our anemic democracy die.

The unraveling of America mirrors the unraveling of Yugoslavia. The Balkan war was not caused by ancient ethnic hatreds. It was caused by the economic collapse of Yugoslavia. The petty criminals and goons who took power harnessed the anger and despair of the unemployed and the desperate. They singled out convenient scapegoats from ethnic Croats to Muslims to Albanians to Gypsies. They set in motion movements that unleashed a feeding frenzy leading to war and self-immolation. There is little difference between the ludicrous would-be poet Radovan Karadzic, who was a figure of ridicule in Sarajevo before the war, and the moronic Glenn Beck or Sarah Palin. There is little difference between the [Oath Keepers](#) and the Serbian militias. We can laugh at these people, but they are not the fools. We are.

The longer we appeal to the Democrats, who are servants of corporate interests, the more stupid and ineffectual we become. Sixty-one percent of Americans believe the country is in decline, according to a recent NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, and they are right. Only 25 percent of those polled said the government can be trusted to protect the interests of the American people. If we do not embrace this outrage and distrust as our own it will be expressed through a terrifying right-wing backlash.

"It is time for us to stop talking about right and left," McKinney told me. "The old political paradigm that serves the interests of the people who put us in this predicament will not be the paradigm that gets us out of this. I am a child of the South. Janet Napolitano tells me I need to be afraid of people who are labeled white supremacists but I was raised around white supremacists. I am not afraid of white supremacists. I am concerned about my own government. The Patriot Act did not come from the white supremacists, it came from the White House and Congress. [Citizens United](#) did not come from white supremacists, it came from the Supreme Court. Our problem is a problem of governance. I am willing to reach across traditional barriers that have been skillfully constructed by people who benefit from the way the system is organized."

We are bound to a party that has betrayed every principle we claim to espouse, from universal health care to an end to our permanent war economy, to a demand for quality and affordable public education, to a concern for the jobs of the working class. And the hatred expressed within right-wing movements for the college-educated elite, who created or at least did nothing to halt the financial debacle, is not misplaced. Our educated elite, wallowing in self-righteousness, wasted its time in the boutique activism of political correctness as tens of millions of workers lost their jobs. The shouting of racist and bigoted words at black and gay members of Congress, the spitting on a black member of the House, the tossing of bricks through the windows of legislators' offices, are part of the language of rebellion. It is as much a revolt against the educated elite as it is against the government. The blame lies with us. We created the monster.

When someone like Palin posts a map with cross hairs on the districts of Democrats, when she says "Don't Retreat, Instead—RELOAD!" there are desperate people cleaning their weapons who listen. When Christian fascists stand in the pulpits of megachurches and denounce Barack Obama as the Antichrist, there are messianic believers who listen. When a Republican lawmaker shouts "baby killer" at Michigan Democrat Bart Stupak, there are violent extremists who see the mission of saving the unborn as a sacred duty. They have little left to lose. We made sure of that. And the violence they inflict is an expression of the violence they endure.

These movements are not yet full-blown fascist movements. They do not openly call for the extermination of ethnic or religious groups. They do not openly advocate violence. But, as I was told by Fritz Stern, a scholar of fascism who has written about the origins of Nazism, "In Germany there was a yearning for fascism before fascism was invented." It is the yearning that we now see, and it is dangerous. If we do not immediately reincorporate the unemployed and the poor back into the economy, giving them jobs and relief from crippling debt, then the nascent racism and violence that are leaping up around the edges of American society will become a full-blown conflagration.

Left unchecked, the hatred for radical Islam will transform itself into a hatred for Muslims. The hatred for undocumented workers will become a hatred for Mexicans and Central Americans. The hatred for those not defined by this largely white movement as American

patriots will become a hatred for African-Americans. The hatred for liberals will morph into a hatred for all democratic institutions, from universities to government agencies to the press. Our continued impotence and cowardice, our refusal to articulate this anger and stand up in open defiance to the Democrats and the Republicans, will see us swept aside for an age of terror and blood.

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