

By Ray McGovern

From Consortiumnews.com | Original Article

Exclusive: *On Sept. 18, former CIA analyst Ray McGovern gave a talk about “activism” to a conference in Charlottesville, Virginia, focused on the need to confront the military industrial complex. Now, as the occupation of Freedom Plaza in Washington gets underway, his words take on a special resonance.*

The past 50 years have shown that President Dwight Eisenhower was spot on about the Military Industrial Complex and what to expect if Americans were not vigilant, which, of course, we have not been — until maybe now.

An endless train of outrages and indignities can be traced to the inordinate influence of the M.I.C. And a truly formidable challenge awaits those of us determined not to let our democracy be taken away from us by the greed of a small minority.

But the view from where I stand at this podium evokes a powerful feeling of enthusiastic anticipation. The challenges presented by the M.I.C. seem not so daunting as I look out on all you activists.

I'll confess, it took me a while to become comfortable with the sobriquet commonly used these days to introduce me: “intelligence analyst turned activist.” In the circles in which I moved for 30 years, the epithet “activist” was usually hurled in a condescending tone. As in what can activists accomplish?

But, there was the Vietnam War, no? Often it takes a while, but activists do change things.

In an interview several months ago, former President George W. Bush referred sneeringly to “activists.” Like you all, I have become accustomed to the customary sneers and smears.

And that’s precisely why standing here is so important to me. For those given the privilege of looking out at so many gutsy “activists” for Justice, the sneers, smears, and spears lose all their sting.

Hope is reborn, because you give flesh to that hope.

What I think has been especially great is that, over the past days, so many of you have also had the opportunity to be encouraged, fortified by the view from this podium. Perhaps you, too, have found the experience an effective inoculation against despair and a fillip to action.

Paying the Rent

No one has put it better than a precious new friend I met on a “cruise” in the eastern Mediterranean — Alice Walker, who put it this way: “Activism is my rent for living on this planet.”

As some of you know, that attitude found her a passenger on “The Audacity of Hope” — the U.S. Boat to Gaza — this past summer.

On July 1, we made an activist break for the open sea and Gaza but were able to sail only nine nautical miles out of Athens before the Greek government, under extreme pressure from the White House, ordered its Coast Guard to intercept us, threaten to board us, and eventually to impound our boat.

It turned out not so bad. We raised a lot of interest, calling attention to the large open-air prison in which the Likud government in Israel, supported by the taxes we pay, seal off 1.6 million Gazans into the largest open-air prison on the planet.

And, for those who care to look, we exposed our President kow-towing, for the umpteenth time, to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Barack Obama could not get him to agree not to shoot up our boat, as they did the Mavi Marmora in May of last year.

So the White House decided to take the easy way out and bully Greece into issuing an edict that no boats could leave Greek ports for Gaza.

You learn a lot, and often you expose a lot, when you accept the challenge of being an “activist!”

Unreasoned Patience?

I find that people often are conflicted about whether or not to allow themselves to be angry. Thomas Aquinas, who wrote a lot about virtue, got quite angry when he realized there was no word in Latin for just the right amount of anger — for the virtue of anger.

Thomas cited what a famous fourth-century theologian said on the subject: “He or she who is not angry, when there is just cause for anger, sins. Why? Because anger *respicit bonum justitiae*, anger looks to the good of Justice, and if you can live among injustice without anger you are unjust.”

Aquinas added his own corollary; he railed against what he called “unreasoned patience,” which, he said, “sows the seeds of vice, nourishes negligence, and persuades not only evil people but good people to do evil.”

As we look at the effects of the military industrial complex, who will deny that there is just cause

for anger — just the right amount of anger — the virtue of anger. And the fact that this is part of what motivates us — well that's as it should be.

Frankly, I have not thought of us activists being virtuous — but maybe we are, at least in our willingness to channel our anger into challenging and changing the many injustices here and around the world. There should be no room these days for “unreasoned patience.”

Prophets/Activists & Cads

The Hebrew Scriptures feature the witness of prophets channeling the virtue of anger into speaking truth to power. Many of them were eccentric — from the Greek *ek kentron*, off center, out of the mainstream — and they were generally not welcome in their hometowns. Is this beginning to sound a little like you, maybe?

Happily, we don't have to go back to the eighth-century B.C. prophets for examples. We are surrounded by prophets, although the ones I have in mind would be the last to claim that title.

Earlier today I did a little review of the prophets I've run into over the last decade; curiously, all of the ones who came to mind turn out to be women.

Ann Wright, who keynoted us so well on Friday evening, was the first to come to mind. One of the three U.S. diplomats who quit when the U.S. attacked Iraq; mayor of Camp Casey in Crawford, Texas; inspirer and fund raiser for the U.S. Boat to Gaza, with the creative suggestion we name it—I think after some sort of book — “The Audacity of Hope.”

I've had the pleasure of watching Ann up close, and have gotten into the same kind of activist trouble she has.

I remember as one of her finest hours, the one during which she sat quietly as the Senate Judiciary Committee deliberated pompously over whether to approve the appointment of

Rumsfeld's Pentagon lawyer William J. Haynes, II — an Eagle Scout from Waco, alumnus of Harvard Law, and more recently a “justifier” of torture — to be a federal judge.

(The pattern had already been set when Jay Bybee of the Justice Department, who signed off on John Yoo's many mafia-style memoranda approving torture, was given a life-time appointment as a federal judge.)

Ann can be quiet in such circumstances for, well, not very long. She stood up and loudly warned those august senators that they were about to give a judgeship to a felon. The committee adjourned that day before it was supposed to, and I think it's pretty clear that the ruckus Ann made was instrumental in defeating Haynes's appointment.

The findings of a subsequent Senate Armed Services Committee report on torture provide chapter and verse about why Haynes and his boss Rumsfeld should be behind bars.

Mentioning John Yoo evokes the example of West Coast prophet Susan Harman, who has made it her business to cling to Yoo like chewing gum. Seeing Susan's familiar face, Yoo now says, “Hello there.” Susan responds, “Torture there.”

Yoo has enough friends in high places that there are many to choose from were we as brave and conscientious as Susan in bird-dogging. Perhaps we could each choose one.

Speaking of bird-dogging, how could I not mention the gutsy women who lead World Can't Wait's watch-dog group “War Criminal Watch.” It was they that got me a ticket to Donald Rumsfeld's speech in Atlanta five years ago; and yet another to be with him more recently at a forum run by the Jewish Policy Center at the 92nd Street Y in New York.

(This time the NYPD threw me out before I could ask Rumsfeld a question, but the bruises were minor compared with those caused by the thugs who brutalized me as I stood silently with my back to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during a speech she gave in February.)

More Prophets

How about Rae Abileah, who got brutalized when she called for justice for Palestine, as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was receiving fulsome applause from our bought-and-sold Congresspeople in May.

Or the Code Pink women of Dallas, in the belly of the beast, who do something imaginatively conspicuous every time George W. Bush surfaces for air.

Or Jesselyn Radack, Esq., fired from the Justice Department for insisting that John Walker Lindh, labeled for political purposes as "The American Taliban," be given his rights as an American citizen.

After being blacklisted from her profession, Jesselyn has landed on both feet as National Security and Human Rights Counsel at the Government Accountability Project, which focuses on protecting/defending whistleblowers.

And she was a terrific support to the successful defense of Thomas Drake, ex-NSA senior executive who was recently subjected to a three-year-long witch-hunt aimed at dissuading anyone from blowing the whistle.

And then there's Cindy Sheehan, who had the courage to ask Bush to explain to her what "noble cause" had taken the life of her son Casey.

And former FBI special agent/attorney Coleen Rowley, who took a huge risk — just one year short of retirement — in blowing a loud whistle about FBI shortcomings before 9/11, and who continues to work, in a variety of imaginative ways, for Justice. (Warning: do not, within earshot of Coleen, call her a prophet.)

Of women prophet/activists I have gotten to know over the past ten years I could go on forever.

The Shibboleth of Success

One trait peculiar not only to the Hebrew prophets of the eighth century but to the ones I just mentioned is that they did not get hung up on the all-too-familiar drive for success.

That drive, I think, is a distinctly American trait. We generally do not want to embark on some course without there being a reasonable prospect of success, do we? Who enjoys becoming the object of ridicule?

The felt imperative to be "successful" can be a real impediment to acting for Justice. A prophet/activist from whom I have drawn inspiration is Dan Berrigan. I'd like to share some of the wisdom that seeps through his autobiography, *To Dwell in Peace*.

Berrigan writes that after he, his brother Phil, and a small group of others had used homemade napalm to burn draft cards in Catonsville, Maryland, in May 1968 at the height of the Vietnam War, Dan mused about why he took such a risk:

"I came upon a precious insight. ... Something like this: presupposing integrity and discipline, one is justified in entering upon a large risk; not indeed because the outcome is assured, but because the integrity and value of the act have spoken aloud. ...

"Success or efficiency are placed where they belong: in the background. They are not irrelevant, but they are far from central.

"I was in need of such reflections as we faced the public after our crime. ... All sides agreed — we were fools or renegades or plain crazy. ...

"One had very little to go on; and one went ahead nonetheless. Still, the 'little,' had at least one

advantage. One was free to concentrate on the act itself, without regard to its reception in the world. Free to concentrate on moral preparation, consistency, conscience. Looked at in this light, the 'little' appeared a treasure."

"The act was let go, its truth and goodness were entrusted to the four winds. Indeed, good consequences were of small matter to me, compared with the integrity of the action, the need responded to, the spirits lifted. ..."

The more recent prophets and activists I have known have generally been able to do this — to release the truth of the act to the four winds. And I think that helps them avoid taking themselves too seriously.

It seemed to work that way with Dan Berrigan. Here's how he recounts the immediate aftermath of the action at Catonsville:

"We sat in custody in the back room of the Catonsville Post Office, weak with relief. ... Three or four FBI honchos entered portentously. Their leader, a jut-jawed paradigm, surveyed us from the doorway. His eagle-eye lit on Philip. He roared out: 'Him again! Good God, I'm changing my religion!'

"I could think of no greater tribute to my brother."

The Berrigans help affirm for me that this God of ours is a God of laughter, and we are the entertainment. And that's just one reason a light touch is often required.

Code Pink knows this well. Watch, for example, <http://codepink.org/article.php?id=5916> the intervention team from War Addicts Anonymous engage President Obama outside the White House. Obama says, "I can quit anytime I want!" But can he?

How I look forward to descending on our own "Tahrir Square" at Freedom Plaza in Washington

starting on Oct. 6. In the final analysis we will be confronting the “upper crust,” which my Irish grandmother described as “a bunch of crumbs held together by a lot of dough.”

But will we be successful? Wrong question. We will be faithful — and, I am sure — have a lot of fun in the process. For I believe it is true: the good is worth doing because it is good. Feels good, too.