

John Conyers and the Bush Dictatorship

Written by BAR editor and senior columnist Margaret Kimberley ID3706
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Freedom Rider: John Conyers and the Bush Dictatorship by BAR editor and senior columnist Margaret Kimberley

Hardly anyone in the corporate media seemed to notice when, last month, George Bush gave himself the power to run the government all by himself in situations of "catastrophic emergency." It would also be up to Bush to decide just what constitutes such an emergency - natural disaster, economic dislocation, or even launching of another of Bush's premeditated wars, who knows? Democratic leadership remained silent as Bush set the stage for dictatorship-at-will. It's past time for Rep. John Conyers to put impeachment back "on the table" - before it's too late.

"If this were a dictatorship, it'd be a heck of a lot easier, just so long as I'm the dictator." - George W. Bush

According to an old saying, many a truth is often said in jest. Not enough people took notice on December 18, 2000 when George W. Bush said those awful words. On that date the president-elect went to Capital Hill for a get acquainted session with Congressional leaders. He emerged from that meeting with his well known smirk, and gave Congress and the American people the finger. No one should be shocked when a man who tells jokes about dictatorship turns into a dictator.

Without fanfare, or announcement of any kind, the president recently signed a directive which states that in case of a "catastrophic emergency" the "President shall lead the activities of the Federal Government for ensuring constitutional government." What is a catastrophic emergency? Well, it is anything that Bush says it is.

The document, [National Continuity Policy](#), was signed by the president on May 9, 2007 and unceremoniously posted on the White House website. It defines catastrophic emergency as "any incident, regardless of location, that results in extraordinary levels of mass casualties, damage, or disruption severely affecting the U.S. population, infrastructure, environment, economy, or government function."

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That language describes hurricanes, earthquakes, black outs, flu epidemics, terror attacks, or mass demonstrations. If location doesn't matter, the president can usurp the constitutionally guaranteed powers of Congress and the judiciary because of an attack on Iran or a surge of casualties in Iraq. L"etat c'est Bush.

The president announced that he is crowning himself king and thereby making his sick wishes come true. What should be a headline in every major newspaper in the nation has been covered only by the [Boston Globe](#). None of the television networks have said a word nor has a peep been heard from Congress.

This announcement is consistent with other Bush administration actions. In 2006 the federal government awarded a contract to KBR, a subsidiary of Cheney's Halliburton, to build "[detention centers](#)"

"in case of a national immigration emergency. Homeland Security has already established an immigrant detention facility in Texas, the T. Don Hutto center, that has incarcerated entire families, including children. When U.N. human rights investigator Jorge Bustamante showed up for a pre-arranged visit he was refused entry and

[turned away.](#)

Congress has also been silent about this blatant power grab and usurpation of its authority. [The National Emergencies Act](#)

gives Congress the right to prevent open ended declarations of states of emergency, but that act's existence is not very comforting. If Congress won't even speak up about the National Continuity Policy, why would they speak up if Bush declared an emergency and told them to go to hell? Congressional Democratic leaders Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi would once again go along to get along as the Bushites began a reign of terror against democracy.

Reid and Pelosi have their own little reign of terror in Washington. They have cracked the whip and told progressives to shut up and toe the party line. John Conyers is one of their victims. He has been in Congress longer than all but a few of his colleagues and has been called the conscience of the Congressional Black Caucus. He now serves as Chairman of the House Judiciary committee. Ever since the Republican victory in 1994, progressives have hoped for a return to Democratic control and with it the return of stalwarts like John Conyers to committee chairmanships.

While Democrats were in the wilderness, Conyers spoke often about impeachment and

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unequivocally stated that he intended to hold hearings as soon as he had the opportunity. In 2005 Judiciary Committee staff issued a report recommending that Congress establish a select committee to investigate whether or not the President Bush and Vice President Cheney had committed [impeachable offenses](#).

Once Conyers had that power, he refused to use it. He was forced into silence by Pelosi, who said that impeachment is "off the table." Conyers had a [strange defense](#). He called himself a liar:

"In this campaign, there was an orchestrated right-wing effort to distort my position on impeachment. The incoming speaker has said that impeachment is off the table. I am in total agreement with her on this issue: Impeachment is off the table." Just to make certain he wasn't misunderstood, Conyers added, "Impeachment would not be good for the American people. The country does not want or need any more paralyzed partisan government."

It is time to stop letting Conyers and the rest of his colleagues off the hook. They too are complicit in the ever increasing erosion of our civil rights and civil liberties. A coordinated impeachment effort might slow down or even stop the Bush coronation.

The long years of waiting for Conyers, a committed progressive for decades, to chair the House Judiciary Committee were wasted. His most recent statement is not much better than his self-repudiation after the November 2006 election. He now claims to have "been [supportive of that movement](#) (for impeachment). I encourage that nationwide." Well, that is awfully big of him.

The next round of demonstrations in Washington should be directed at the Democrats, including members of the Congressional Black Caucus. Democratic timidity only encourages the Republicans. When a hurricane, terror plot or bird flu pandemic begins, we may as well pack our bags and join immigrants at the Hutto detention center. Immigrants were just used for practice. Bush is preparing for the real thing and there isn't anyone in a position to stop him who is willing to do it.

Margaret Kimberley's Freedom Rider column appears weekly in BAR. Ms. Kimberley lives in

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