

**The
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**Cover Story
Who is Serving Who?
Congressional Black Caucus Chief
Rejects Need to Account
by BC Co-Publishers Glen Ford and Peter Gamble**

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There is something very wrong going on in the Congressional Black Caucus. However, the malady has a long history. A class of Black politicians think that we exist to support *them*, rather than that they are elected to support *us*.

The sickness became acute at the CBC Weekend, in Washington, DC – as much a social occasion as a political one. The newly formed CBC Monitor had circulated hundreds of Report Cards, that showed seven members had earned the distinction of “Derelicts of the Black Caucus.” The “derelicts” had voted against the interests of their constituents – the people who voted them into office – in favor of the corporate agenda pushed by the Republican Party. At the top of the list were Rep. Harold Ford, Jr, of Memphis, and David Scott, of suburban Atlanta. Riding right behind them on the corporate money train were Representatives Sanford Bishop (D–GA), Albert Wynn (D–MD), Artur Davis (D–AL), Gregory Meeks (D–NY), and William Jefferson (D–LA). All had crossed over to the Republican side of the aisle on a number of key economic issues, including the bankruptcy bill that threatens to further impoverish Black communities that are already encircled by predatory lending agencies.

The CBC Monitor was established to keep track of the Congressional Black Caucus, which claims to be the “conscience of the congress.” We wish that were so, but in this session of congress, fully 37 percent of the Caucus voted with the GOP on “bright line” issues. (See BC, “How to Fix the Fractured Black Caucus,” April 28, 2005).

But CBC chairman Mel Watt (D–NC) doesn’t see the bright lines. Although Watt has voted as a consistent progressive, as CBC chairman he has shown no inclination to rein in the opportunists in the CBC ranks – those who sell out to the corporations that contribute to their campaigns. Instead, he has allowed them to clone themselves, and proliferate throughout the key positions of the Caucus and the Democratic Party.

The Encounter

The Black Commentator – Congressional Black Caucus Chief Rejects Need to Account

Mel Watt, the CBC chief, saw Leutisha Stills sitting at his table during CBC weekend, speaking on her cell phone. What followed was an amazing encounter that speaks volumes. Watt didn't know that Stills had been circulating the CBC Monitor. He approached her. Leutisha Stills reports that "the conversation started pleasantly enough, but took a nasty turn when the Report Card was mentioned."

The Congressional Black Caucus doesn't want to be reported on. Watt went off. At that moment, Niyi Shomade, a CBC Monitor founder arrived, to confront the congressman. Watt dismissed the criticism of the CBC as "name-calling" by "you damned bloggers." He "went on," according to Stills, to "a rant about how our group was no better than the white media in exposing the fractures within the Caucus."

It seems the CBC Monitor hit a nerve. A deep one. The point that Mel Watt appears to be trying to make is that Black folks shouldn't criticize Black leadership. Otherwise, we are helping white folks. This is ridiculous, and denies us our right to democratic action. We became citizens, finally, in the Sixties. No Black man is going to extinguish that. Not even Mel Watt.

The fact is, the CBC is broken, and cannot make a decision that represents the Consensus of the Black community, because it is infested by corporate money. Watt denies that economic issues, which were the basis of the CBC Report Card, are key Black issues. Watt told the CBC Monitor's Leutisha Stills that "the bankruptcy bill or CAFTA wasn't going to have the effect on the Black community as been perceived."

What Mel Watt and an apparent consensus of the CBC's leadership (not its members) have seemed to decide, is that no position can be taken if there is no unanimity. That means that any corporate whore who gets bought can stop the machinery. If this remains the norm, there is no reason for a Congressional Black Caucus. In fact, there is a need for split that would allow the truly progressive Members to act.

Splits are difficult. They should not be taken lightly. But what Mel Watt spoke lays down the line – that there should be no criticism of Black politicians by Black people. That is unacceptable. We will no longer worship Black elected officials who do not *represent*.