

# Remembering Lynne Stewart. A People's Lawyer

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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*On Wednesday evening, humanity lost redoubtable civil rights lawyer **Lynne Stewart**. Cancer and complications from a massive stroke days days earlier, followed by mini-strokes, took her at age 77.*

I and many others who knew and loved her mourn her passing. She now belongs to the ages. I first met Lynne at a National Lawyers Guild gathering in Chicago to honor her dedicated human and civil rights work.

I was the only non-lawyer there. I spotted her instantly when she arrived, spoke to her briefly, thanked her for extraordinary work, embraced her, then entered an area where others were seated.

Everyone stood and applauded, including some notable Chicago attorneys. It was a riveting moment I'll never forget.

Lynne was a people's lawyer, a human and civil rights champion, a justice warrior, targeted by the Bush/Cheney administration for defending a client they wanted imprisoned - **Sheik Abdel Rahman**, framed for seditious conspiracy in connection with the 1993 World Trade Center bombing he had nothing to do with.

Lynne served as a member of a court-appointed defense team at the request of former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark.

She was unjustly charged under the 1996 Antiterrorism Act with with four counts of aiding and abetting a terrorist organization, along with violating Special Administrative Measures (SAMS) imposed by the US Bureau of Prisons.

She was never one to back off from or shun controversy. For 30 years, she championed the rights of the poor, underprivileged and others rarely afforded due process unless lucky to have an advocate like her.

Where other attorneys feared to tread, she honorably defended Weather Underground's David Gilbert, Richard Williams of the United Freedom Front, Sekou Odinga and Nasser Ahmed of the Black Liberation Army, and many others like them.

She knew the personal risks and courageously took them. On April 9, 2002, her ordeal began when FBI agents unjustly arrested her, searched her office, removing her case files and other materials.

Her show-trial was a travesty of justice. Prosecutors demonized her to pressure jurors to

convict. It was part of an orchestrated witch-hunt process inside and outside court to intimidate other attorneys not to defend clients the DOJ wanted convicted.

At the time, then-National Lawyers Guild President Michael Avery said the Justice Department “was resolute from day one in making a symbol out of Lynne Stewart in support of its campaign to deny people charged with crimes of effective legal representation.”

In pronouncing sentence Judge John Koeltl said “(s)he has represented the poor, the disadvantaged and the unpopular (and she had) enormous skill and dedication (earning little money for it). It is no exaggeration to say that Ms. Stewart performed a public service not only to her clients but to the nation.”

Her case was precedent-setting, chilling, and according to former Center for Constitutional Rights President Michael Ratner, sent “a message to lawyers who represent alleged terrorists that it’s dangerous to do so.”

Her attorney Michael Tigar called her conviction and imprisonment “an attack on a gallant, charismatic and effective fighter for justice,” adding: “I have never seen such an abuse of government power.”

At a news conference preceding her November 2009 imprisonment, Lynne said “I’m too old to cry, but it hurts too much not to.”

She criticized the ruling against her, occurring “on the eve of the arrival of the tortured men from offshore prison in Guantanamo,” adding:

“If you’re going to lawyer for these people, you’d better toe very close to the line that the government has set out (because they’ll) be watching you every inch of the way, (so those who don’t) will end up like Lynne Stewart.”

“This is a case that is bigger than just me personally.” She vowed she’d “go on fighting.”

On December 31, 2013, she was freed by a compassionate release order because of her terminal breast cancer diagnosis, at the time given months to live.

On New Year’s day 2014, she returned home to loved ones, friends and supporters. “It’s just really wonderful. I’m very grateful to be free. We’ve been waiting months and months and months,” she said, explaining she’d work to help other political prisoners.

America punishes its best, honors its worst, revealing its merciless dark side at home and abroad.

Lynne is survived by her human rights champion husband Ralph Poynter, daughters Zenobia Brown, Brenna Stewart, son Geoffrey, sister Laurel Freedman, brother Donald Feltham and six grandchildren.

Once asked why she became a lawyer, she said “I wanted to change things.”

Her “love struggle” continues!

**Stephen Lendman** lives in Chicago. He can be reached at [lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net). His new book as editor and contributor is titled “Flashpoint in Ukraine: How the US Drive for

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### About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at [lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net). His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

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