

Taking the Side of the Billionaires

Exclusive: America's Right pitches itself as populist, taking the side of the common man against "big gov-mint" and "lib-rhul elites," but its actual policies from the NFL lockout to Rep. Paul Ryan's budget side with the billionaires in what amounts to an escalating class war against the middle class and the poor, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

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If American football fans end up facing a fall without NFL games, they probably won't blame George W. Bush and other Republican presidents for packing the federal courts with right-wing judges, but it was two Bush appointees who reversed a District Court ruling that would have ended the lockout of players.

The Appeals Court judgment encouraged the NFL's hardline billionaire owners to resist making the kinds of compromises that a few less intransigent owners recognize could easily resolve the impasse.

Now, the hardliners simply assume that Republican judges will keep siding with the NFL owners and thus enable them to beat down the players, eventually assuring the billionaire owners a bigger piece of the revenue pie even if that means losing some or all of the 2011 season.

What many average Americans, especially white guys, don't seem to understand is that whatever the populist-styled rhetoric of Fox News or Rush Limbaugh, the Right's default position is to side with the billionaires and to show little or no regard for the fate of anyone else, whether NFL players or sick senior citizens.

Still, one must give the Right credit for having worked hard refining how to phrase its arguments. Right-wingers even have turned the term "class warfare" against the Left by shouting the phrase in a mocking fashion whenever anyone tries to blunt the "class warfare" that the billionaires have been waging against the middle class and the poor for decades.

On right-wing TV and talk radio across the country, there are tag teams of macho men pretending that "class warfare" exists only in the fevered imagination of the Left. But billionaire investor Warren Buffett has acknowledged the truth: "There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning."

The right-wing propagandists further earn their keep by disparaging science as

“elitist.” So, even as the dire predictions from climate-change experts that global warming will generate more extreme weather seem to be coming true, many Americans who have listened to the “climate-change-deniers” for years still reject the scientific warnings.

While no single weather event can be connected to the broader trend of climate change, the warnings about what might happen when the earth’s atmosphere heats up and absorbs more moisture seem to be applicable to the historic flooding in some parts of the world, droughts in others, and the outbreak of particularly violent storms.

Heat and moisture are especially dangerous ingredients for hurricanes and tornados.

Ironically, the parts of the United States hardest hit by this severe weather are those represented predominately by Republicans who have been at the forefront of obstructing government efforts to address the global-warming crisis.

Flooding, hurricanes and tornados have inflicted horrendous damage on Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, Tennessee, Missouri and Oklahoma all part of the Republican base.

God’s Punishment?

If televangelist Pat Robertson were a left-winger instead of a right-winger, he might be saying that God is punishing these “red states” for doubting the science of global warming.

However, even as the U.S. news obsesses over the violent weather, mainstream media stars have steered clear of whether global warming might be a factor. It’s as if they know that they’d only be inviting career-damaging attacks from the Right if they did anything to connect the dots.

The Right also is not eager to explain how these catastrophes will require emergency funding and rebuilding assistance from the federal government. After all, you don’t want Republican voters to understand that sometimes “self-reliance” alone doesn’t cut it; sometimes, we all need help and the government must be part of that assistance.

In the case of the killer tornado that devastated Joplin, Missouri, House Republicans, without a hint of irony, are extracting the funds for disaster relief from green energy programs, which remain a favorite GOP target since many Republicans still insist there is no such thing as global warming.

At both state and national levels, Republican leaders have lined up behind climate-change deniers, with former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty just the latest GOP presidential hopeful to apologize for his past support of a cap-and-trade system aimed at reducing global-warming gases.

Any serious move toward alternative energies would, of course, be costly to the giant oil companies and their billionaire owners, like David Koch of Koch Industries who has spent millions of dollars funding right-wing organizations, such as the Tea Party. The Right's media/political operatives know better than to bite the hand that feeds them.

GOP orthodoxy also disdains tax increases on the rich or even elimination of tax breaks for the oil industry. The Republican insistence on low tax rates for the wealthy, in turn, has forced consideration of other policy proposals to achieve savings from services for average Americans.

That is why congressional Republicans have targeted Medicare with a plan that would end the current health program for the elderly and replace it with a scheme that would give subsidies to senior citizens who would then have to sign up for health insurance from private industry, which has proven itself far less efficient in providing health care than the government.

The GOP budget, drafted by House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, would impose the Medicare changes on seniors beginning in 10 years.

Most attention on the Ryan plan has focused on estimates that it would cost the average senior citizen more than \$6,000 extra per year, but the proposal also has the effect of privatizing Medicare, meaning that the government would make direct "premium support" payments to profit-making insurance companies whose interest is in maximizing profits, not providing the best possible care for old people.

While the Ryan plan would achieve budget "savings" by shifting the burden of health-care costs onto the elderly, Ryan's budget also would lower tax rates for the wealthiest Americans even more, from 35 percent to 25 percent. Partly because of that tax cut, Ryan's budget would still not be balanced for almost three decades.

Class Warfare

Thus, the battle lines of America's "class warfare" are getting more sharply drawn. The conflict is now over the Right's determination to concentrate even more money and power in the hands of the rich by hobbling any government capability to protect the people's general welfare.

If the Right wins, individual Americans will be left essentially defenseless in the face of unbridled corporate power.

Ryan's Medicare plan may be just the most striking example because it envisions sick old people trying to pick their way through a thicket of private insurance plans with all their confusing language designed to create excuses for denying coverage. It is not an exaggeration to say that Ryan's tight-fisted Medicare plan could consign millions of Americans to a premature death.

The Right's priorities hit home at a town hall meeting held by Rep. Rob Woodall, R-Georgia, when he chastised one of his constituents who worried that Ryan's plan would leave Americans like her, whose employer doesn't extend health benefits to retirees, out of luck.

"Hear yourself, ma'am. Hear yourself," Woodall lectured the woman. "You want the government to take care of you, because your employer decided not to take care of you. My question is, 'When do I decide I'm going to take care of me?'"

However, another constituent noted that Woodall accepted government-paid-for health insurance for himself.

"You are not obligated to take that if you don't want to," the woman said. "Why aren't you going out on the free market in the state where you're a resident and buy your own health care? Be an example.

"Go and get it in a single-subscriber plan, like you want everybody else to have, because you want to end employer-sponsored health plans and government-sponsored health plans. Decline the government health plan and go to Blue Cross/Blue Shield or whoever, and get one for yourself and see how tough it is."

Woodall answered that he was taking his government health insurance "because it's free. It's because it's free."

Self-reliance, it seems, is easier to preach to others than to practice yourself.

Woodall's explanation recalled the hypocrisy of free-market heroine Ayn Rand, whom Rep. Ryan has cited as his political inspiration. In her influential writings, Rand ranted against social programs that enabled the "parasites" among the middle-class and the poor to sap the strength from the admirable rich, but she secretly accepted the benefits of Medicare after she was diagnosed with lung cancer.

A two-pack-a-day smoker, Rand had denied the medical science about the dangers of cigarettes, much as her acolytes today reject the science of global warming.

However, when she developed lung cancer, she connived to have Evva Pryor, an employee of Rand's law firm, arrange Social Security and Medicare benefits for Ann O'Connor, Ayn Rand using her husband's last name.

In *100 Voices: An Oral History of Ayn Rand*, Scott McConnell, founder of the Ayn Rand Institute's media department, quoted Pryor as saying: "Doctors cost a lot more money than books earn and she could be totally wiped out."

So, when push came to shove, even Ayn Rand wasn't above getting help from the "despised government." However, her followers, including Rep. Ryan, now want to strip those guaranteed benefits from other Americans of more modest means than Ayn Rand.

It seems it's okay for average Americans to be wiped out.

Hypocrisy, Hypocrisy

While the Right's penchant for hypocrisy is well-known (note how many Republicans involved in the impeachment of President Bill Clinton had their own extra-marital affairs), the bigger mystery is why so many average-guy Americans volunteer to fight for the rich in the trenches of the Right's class warfare.

Clearly, the Right's propaganda with its endless repetition is very effective, especially given the failure of the American Left to invest significantly in a competing message machine. The Right also has adopted the tone of populism, albeit in support of a well-to-do economic elite.

Yet, perhaps most importantly, the Right has stuck with its battle plan for rallying a significant percentage of middle-class Americans against their own interests.

Four decades ago, President Richard Nixon and his subordinates won elections by demonizing "hippies," "welfare queens" and the "liberal media."

Then, in the late 1970s, a tripartite coalition took shape consisting of the Republican Establishment, neoconservatives and the leaders of the Christian Right. Each group had its priorities.

The rich Republicans wanted deep tax cuts and less business regulation; the neocons wanted big increases in military spending and a freer hand to wage wars; and the Christian Right agreed to supply political foot soldiers in exchange for concessions on social issues, such as abortion and gay rights. Ultimately, each part of the coalition got a chunk of what it wanted.

From Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush, the rich got their taxes slashed, saw regulations rolled back and gained a larger share of the nation's wealth and

political power. The neocons got massive military spending and the chance to dispatch U.S. soldiers to kill Israel's Muslim enemies. The Christian Right got help in restricting abortions and punishing gays.

But what did the American middle-class get?

Over those three decades, the middle-class has stagnated or slipped backward. Labor unions were busted; jobs were shipped overseas; personal debt soared; education grew more expensive, along with medical care. People were working harder and longer for less. Or they couldn't find jobs at all.

With today's Tea Party and the Ryan budget, the Right's coalition is staying on the offensive. If the House budget were passed in total, tax rates for the rich would be reduced another 10 percentage points; military spending would remain high to please the neocons (who foresee a possible war with Iran); and Planned Parenthood and other pet targets of the Christian Right would be zeroed out.

Yet, with the proposed elimination of traditional Medicare, the Ryan budget has lifted the curtain on what the Right's "free market" has in mind for most average Americans, who could expect to find their lives not only more brutish but shorter.

The real-life-and-death consequences of the Right's tax cuts, military spending and culture wars are finally coming into focus. If you're not rich and can't afford to pick up the higher tab on health care you're likely to die younger. Or your kids might have to dig into their pockets to help you out.

Less extreme but still troubling, another consequence of the Right's remarkable success over the past three decades might become apparent on your TV screens this fall.

Thanks to all those right-wing judges packed onto federal appeals courts by Reagan and the two Bushes, American football fans might not have the NFL to watch.

The NFL's lockout of its players seemed to be ending several weeks ago when a lower-court judge ruled against the billionaire owners, but the NFL's lawyers confidently filed an appeal to a three-judge panel on the Eighth Circuit, knowing that they would surely get one dominated by Republican judges.

They did. Steven Colloton and Duane Benton, two Republicans appointed by George W. Bush, constituted the majority on the panel and reflexively sided with the NFL's owners.

The ruling should have surprised no one. After all, the Right's default position

is almost always to side with the billionaires.

[For more on these topics, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a two-book set for the discount price of only \$19. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there. Or go to Amazon.com.
