

# Wrestling Over the Debt Ceiling

As Republicans threaten to throw the U.S. economy into a new crisis by not raising the debt ceiling, Democrats have given ground time and again, erasing one line in the sand after another. But is this self-inflicted crisis real or just another political game, asks Danny Schechter.

By Danny Schechter

Oh, the gnashing of the teeth, Oh, the flamboyant tactics. Oh, all the breaking news excitement on cable news as the debt ceiling countdown saga went down to the wire with an intense political confrontation of a kind we haven't seen before

Or maybe we had in the TARP debate and so-called Obamacare vote, to cite but two moments of high political drama. Once again, all the key players knew the outcome but wanted to keep us guessing because it served everyone's interests.

For Boehner and the boys on the GOP side, it was the great leadership test subplot. He would prove how tough he was, demonstrate his leadership mettle, get equal time with the President, and even look presidential.

The orange tan was gone. His moment in the sunlight had come as he roped the Tea Party kids into the politically correct corral. The congressman from Ohio was now a national force to be reckoned with,

Let's not forget that he had become Wall Street's butt boy. He had many of the big-money lobbyists on his side even as the financiers whined and complained about exaggerated threats to the world economy.

They made some noise but not too much. They well remember the wit and wisdom of ex-White House aide and now Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel about a crisis being a terrible opportunity to waste,

The Wall Street power-crats are high-stakes poker players and this was one game they knew they would win in a political arena dependent on their beneficence.

At the same time, the media compared the charade to the uncertainty of who would be chosen as this week's Bachelorette reality TV show. The Tea Party even got Sen. Charles Schumer and comedian Jon Stewart going by reaching into home-video collections for a sound bite from Ben Affleck's flick, *The Town*, a bank robbery shoot em' up set in Charlestown, Massachusetts.

The only difference was that the pols on the Hill were interested in serving the banksters and had their eyes set on slightly bigger banks.

Some analysts put the Republican tactics down to “lunacy,” others to irrationality.

But this gambit was far more rational than most commentators realized. It reminded me of Richard Nixon’s “madman strategy” to make the Vietnamese think he was crazy enough to blow up their dykes or even drop the big one. It was a fear tactic in the game of psychological warfare.

New York Times columnist Paul Krugman understood what was going on, seconding my own analysis on the kamikaze tactics that the Right was using. He wrote what most of the media obfuscated about:

“The facts of the crisis over the debt ceiling aren’t complicated. Republicans have, in effect, taken America hostage, threatening to undermine the economy and disrupt the essential business of government unless they get policy concessions they would never have been able to enact through legislation.

“And Democrats – who would have been justified in rejecting this extortion altogether – have, in fact, gone a long way toward meeting those Republican demands.”

And, oh yes, the President had some big skin in the game. It gave him the posturing moment he needed to show how “balanced” he was, and how centrist he could become.

Obama talked left to move right, as Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting noted:

“Forget about ‘winning the future’ – Barack Obama wants to win the center. That’s what the Washington Post is telling readers ([7/25/11](#)): **Obama ‘Big Deal’ on Debt a Gamble to Win the Center.**

“Advisers think securing his plan would ensure general-election victory

“The Post’s Zachary A. Goldfarb (who can’t be held responsible for the headline) explained that Obama was making Republicans an offer they couldn’t refuse.

“He added: ‘Obama’s political advisers have long believed that securing such an agreement would provide an enormous boost to his 2012 campaign, according to people familiar with White House thinking. In particular, they want to preserve and improve the president’s standing among independents.’”

FAIR dipped into its own archive to remind us of an article from September 2009 which showed the President was under pressure even then to drop a focus on jobs to concentrate on the deficit.

In other words, this whole strategy is not new but years in the making, as

Veronica Cassidy wrote for FAIR's Extra! magazine:

"Parroting the Republican Party, corporate media have recently devoted much energy to deploring the federal deficit and chastising President Barack Obama for not focusing enough on balancing the budget.

"Very soon, media warn, either spending must be cut or taxes will need to be raised across the board, an argument that rests on the assumption that deficit reduction is, indeed, the top economic priority"

And, so, White House priorities shifted subtly to please the plutocrats and try to neutralize the Tea Party fanatics by co-opting their program the way Bill Clinton did in 1996.

It was called "triangulation" then. Obama's own supporters call it "betrayal" now; Obama's pro-Wall Street economic team made clear they wouldn't give the men on The Street too much to worry about.

And so what happens now? The Republicans get their bill, unify their ranks even though it's just more show and tell.

As Reuters explains, it's all a prelude to coming back to the bargaining table at the 11th hour to make a deal that both sides can use to political advantage.

Read this and as you do, read between the lines;

"The House of Representatives approved a Republican deficit plan on Friday that has no chance of becoming law **but could pave the way for a last-ditch bid for bipartisan compromise** to avert a crippling national default."

This was the scenario, more akin to a Kabuki play than a real political fight. It's more like professional wrestling of the kind they perform at the Capital Arena not far from Capitol Hill.

The audience is hyped. The wrestlers pretend to hate each other, and arouse the crowd with acts of physical aggression. The match looks fierce, but, as everyone knows, it is fixed and scripted.

The musclemen throw each other around the ring, sometimes even gushing blood. The big bruisers denounce each other until it's over to the count of 1-2-3; the bad guy always goes down.

The match ends, imagine that, just in time for a commercial break. Here it will end at the debt ceiling deadline. Each side will claim victory.

There is no ceiling on these political shenanigans. It's just part of fast-paced

game designed to keep the public on the sidelines and on the edge of uncertainty while the media keeps the politicians in the spotlight and excites the base in both parties,

In the end, the media will salute both sides for putting country above party. The only deficit here is one of political morality and honesty.

You tell me: am I too cynical, or is this the way what some call poli-tricks are played?

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## God, Palin and Politics

Pentecostalism, a non-rational form of Christianity whose adherents believe they speak directly to God and favor apocalyptic prophecies, is adding to the polarization of American politics behind the movement's champion, Sarah Palin. Rev. Howard Bess explains the emergence of this distinctive brand of Christianity.

By the Rev. Howard Bess

All Christians are theologians, but they do not think of themselves in those terms. Most Christians think of their pastors as theologians and also gladly give that office to learned women and men who teach in colleges or seminaries, but they do not give the title of theologian to themselves.

When doing theology, mainstream Christian theologians consider Bible, reason and tradition in some sort of balance. However, Pentecostals break with this approach because the foundation of their faith is a direct, personal experience with God.

Tradition, reason, and even the Bible take a back seat to the personal experience of the Pentecostal believer. Pentecostal Christians are all theologians because they believe they have met God personally.

Thus, Pentecostalism is a non-rational, experiential religion. Note also must be made that Pentecostalism is non-rational, not irrational. What this means is that reason does not play a significant role in theological formations. Ultimate reality is based on an individual's personal encounter with God.

Some observers suggest that Pentecostalism attracts the poor and the under-educated. However, research is showing that this is not true. Many highly educated and professional people are being drawn to this experiential faith.

Understanding Pentecostals on the American religious scene may be difficult, but their arrival on the political scene seems even more puzzling. Pundits have completely missed the difference between Pentecostal Christians and mainline Evangelical/Fundamentalist Christians.

While fielding candidates for every level of elected office, Pentecostals have produced one high-profile candidate for President of the United States. Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin is that Pentecostal.

As Sarah Palin has made unorthodox decisions, pundits have declared that she cannot handle politics in her independent manner and be a winner. But she will not go away. She has now said that she will make her candidacy intentions known in September.

When she makes her decision, it will not be at the encouragement of advisers or poll numbers. Her decision will be based on God whispering in her ear. It will be the same God who, she believes, has called her to be a special person in divine history.

Some pundits have compared Sarah Palin with declared presidential candidate Rep. Michelle Bachmann of Minnesota, but they are very different. Michelle Bachmann is a member of a Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod church. Bachmann's theology is based on a tightly held union of Bible and reason. It has zero space for the experiential faith found in Pentecostalism.

Sarah Palin stands alone as the representative of the fastest-growing religious movement in the United States. When she says "I can win," she is not speaking with tongue in cheek. She is speaking out of a profound personal relationship with her God.

There have always been Pentecostal Christians, but church hierarchies have successfully contained their influence. However, America was the perfect seedbed for that pattern to be broken. Freedom to practice one's own faith is a cardinal right of Americans.

The first great wave of Pentecostal Christianity has its root in a revival that took place on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in the first decade of the 20th century. It was a revival that lasted for three years. Yet, formal program structures were not apparent.

The Spirit reigned in uncontained freedom. The Azusa Street revival is

considered the birth event of what is known as the First Wave. The impact was nationwide, but numerically insignificant.

The Second Wave developed after World War II and the advent of television. Pentecostals mastered television. They made religious television exciting. Pentecostal evangelists such as Kathryn Kuhlman, Oral Roberts, Rex Humbard, Jim Bakker, and Jimmy Swaggart led the way.

Each developed huge followings and Pentecostal numbers were no longer insignificant, though exact counts are difficult.

There are now over 1,000 Pentecostal denominations in the United States, but they hold very loose controls over their member churches and many Pentecostal churches are completely unaffiliated. Current estimates are that 15-20 percent of American Christians are Pentecostal, and that one-quarter of the world Christian population is Pentecostal.

Some Pentecostals believe that the world is now in the early stages of the Third Wave. They believe it is the movement that will bring world domination to Pentecostals.

Agree or disagree, the waves of Pentecostalism have ushered in a new day in American politics.

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