

Lessons from Gov. Walker's Win

Exclusive: Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, the new rock-star of the Republican Right, rode a wave of corporate money and anti-union sentiment to a recall victory. But his win could wake up progressives to the need for more media outreach to educate citizens on the dangers of unchecked corporate power, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The victory of Wisconsin's Republican Gov. Scott Walker, beating back a recall effort led by labor unions and liberal activists, underscores not only the Right's structural advantages in terms of money but the failure of the American Left over the past several decades to counter anti-government and anti-union propaganda.

Right-wing attacks demonizing Big Government and Big Labor have gone substantially uncontested by progressives who shut down or sold off much of their media in the 1970s (after the Vietnam War) and have resisted any serious effort to build a media infrastructure since then.

Meanwhile, the Right has invested billions upon billions of dollars over the past three decades in building a vertically integrated media machine that makes its case to Americans over a variety of platforms (cable TV, talk radio, well-funded Internet sites, newspapers, magazines and books). The Left simply has nothing to compare. Wealthy progressives have mostly sat on the sidelines.

This media imbalance including attack groups to go after the occasional mainstream journalist who does dare challenge the Right's propaganda has prevented average Americans, especially middle-class white men, from understanding the danger they face from unrestrained corporate power.

For instance, Wisconsin exit polls showed voters worrying about intrusive government and public-employee unions. A slight plurality favored the Tea Party and a majority supported Walker's efforts to deny state workers collective bargaining rights. Those attitudes were reflected in the Wisconsin outcome, with Walker besting Democrat Tom Barrett, 53 percent to 46 percent.

Yes, the flood of donations from right-wing billionaires buying up TV air time was important, but those messages resonated in large part because they reinforced the propaganda that Americans see and hear every day when they turn on their TVs or listen to their radios.

Americans are conditioned to the message that the "free market" is magical and

will solve their problems if only Big Government and Big Labor are kept out of the way. The countervailing message that the greed of Big Business has become a destructive force, leading the United States and the world toward ruin, is a harder sell because it is rarely heard and thus dissonant.

Today, the Left's most important media voice is MSNBC, which is owned by Comcast and General Electric. Over the past several years, MSNBC has allowed a block of liberal programming in the evenings, but only after failing in earlier efforts to out-Fox Fox News in competition for the larger audience on the Right. That caused MSNBC to seek out the smaller but still profitable audience on the Left.

In other words, unlike Rupert Murdoch's Fox News, which is committed to a right-wing agenda, MSNBC is just tolerating liberal shows for their ratings, a calculation that could easily change if Comcast and General Electric sense that their other corporate interests are being put at risk. Remember, their other major cable TV property, CNBC, is dominated by correspondents shilling for rich investment bankers.

Hard Truth

Because of this national media imbalance, millions of Americans have failed to comprehend the hard truth of their economic situation: Even if there were no recession, corporations simply don't need as many of us as they used to. The combination of advanced technology and cheap labor abroad has made us expendable as workers (though paradoxically the corporations still want us as consumers).

The contradiction in that reality (that they don't want to pay us but they do want us to keep spending) is at the heart of America's economic crisis today.

The Great Recession has made matters worse, reinforcing the conviction among CEOs that their companies can make do with a lot fewer American workers. The recession also gave companies cover for culling their payrolls and announcing their determination to stay "lean" by relying on technology and shifting jobs overseas.

So, even as corporate profits recover, American workers shouldn't expect companies to hire up. And, the Republican prescription of slashing government payrolls to reduce taxes again mostly for the rich is only going to make the employment crisis worse. The private sector still won't hire up and there will be more workers competing for the few jobs that are out there.

The good news is that there is an obvious solution to this structural economic problem: The federal government could increase taxes on the rich, i.e., those who have been profiting off cheap foreign labor and advanced technology, and then recycle some of that money back to "expendable" workers via various jobs

programs, from repairing the nation's infrastructure to improving the quality of life.

During some of America's biggest boom years in the Fifties and Sixties, the top marginal tax rate was 90 and 70 percent, respectively. Now, the top marginal rate is 35 percent on earned income and 15 percent on capital gains. That means, some rich investors are paying tax rates only one-sixth of the top rate under Dwight Eisenhower and less than one-quarter the top rate under John Kennedy.

So, there is no reason to think that higher tax rates on the rich would be "job-killers," as the Republicans and their media allies say endlessly. Indeed, the Fifties and Sixties were a golden age for American workers, and a more recent experiment with slightly higher tax rates, raised to just below 40 percent under Bill Clinton, was accompanied by the nation's last major expansion of employment (and a balanced budget).

To protect the overall economy, the government also could impose reasonable regulations on corporations to prevent dangerous excesses and to ensure that workers (and consumers) get a fair shake. It would make sense, too, to strengthen the ability of unions to negotiate for higher pay, rather than marginalize them.

Through a mix of smart government investments and checks on corporate hegemony, a reinvigorated middle class could afford to buy goods and, in turn, make businesses *more* profitable. The alternative of a tiny slice of super-rich living in unparalleled luxury while most people see their modest dreams crushed is not only a recipe for political disorder but ultimately won't even be good for the rich.

Thus, the answer for middle-class and working-class people should be obvious: Support a democratized and energized government that intervenes on behalf of the broader society and insists that the spoils of a world market and advanced technology are shared more equitably.

After all, many of those business opportunities created by high-tech and free trade were made possible by the U.S. government investing in things like the space program, the Internet, an interstate highway system and global security.

Bad News

But the bad news is that Big Money has now run amok. Corporate chieftains are embracing Ayn Randian theories about the morality of inequality.

To back up this extreme ideology, they've also financed a political/media industry that deludes average Americans about the nature of the threat they

face. It's an endless process of waving shiny objects before the eyes of the citizenry and it works.

This political/media structure also can inflict punishments. Politicians and media figures who step out of line pay a steep price. After all, the system's well-compensated propagandists are very skilled at making their opponents look bad and there's always some personal failing or professional mistake that can be highlighted, exaggerated and turned into the defining element of a target's life.

Mainstream journalists, who worry that they too could be targeted by the Right, have adapted to this ugly system by joining in it, focusing on the foibles of the target *du jour*.

In Campaign 2000, when Al Gore was regarded as a threat (mostly because of his environmentalism but also because he saw benefits in wise governance), the Right and the mainstream media transformed him into "Lyn' Al," the delusional boaster about his imaginary accomplishments.

The fact that the press including the New York Times and the Washington Post had to make up quotes for Gore to "prove" the point made a certain kind of sense if you understood the deformed political/media structure that now exists in the United States. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Al Gore vs. the Media](#)" or [Neck Deep](#).]

In Campaign 2000, the American Left didn't help things when Green Party candidate Ralph Nader campaigned on the slogan, "not a dime's worth of difference" between Al Gore and George W. Bush. That was arguably the most destructive falsehood in U.S. political history (if one considers the consequences of the Bush presidency and his Supreme Court appointments, think: *Citizens United*.)

Something similar is underway now with President Barack Obama, whose mild center-left reforms and his rhetorical defense of government as a force for good have infuriated the Right.

A recent Maureen Dowd column in the New York Times summed up the emerging Obama conventional wisdom that seeks to explain his failure to solve the nation's problems by dissecting Obama's difficult childhood as a mixed-raced child abandoned by his father and often separated from his mother. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The 'Blame Obama' Syndrome](#)."]]

Obviously, the nation's problems are far deeper than Obama's personality flaws. But Dowd's column fits with the broader pattern of blaming anyone who challenges the status quo (even slightly).

So, here's the conundrum: The United States and the world are confronted with some of the most dangerous challenges ever, including the existential threat of global warming which could dangerously destabilize the Earth's nations as it gradually makes the planet uninhabitable.

As a rapacious capitalism ravishes the Earth's diminishing resources, an ascendant Right also is determined to roll back social progress made over the past century or more. And, the gains from technological progress are being claimed by a smaller and smaller percentage of the world's population.

There is an urgency to reverse these trends. But that will require convincing citizens, especially in the United States, that government and, yes, higher taxes are vital components of any solution.

[To read more of Robert Parry's writings, you can now order his last two books, *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, at the discount price of only \$16 for both. For details on the special offer, [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.

Bush Blocked Iran Nuke Deal

A former top Iranian negotiator says Iran offered the West a deal in 2005 that would have eliminated the possibility of Iran developing a nuclear bomb, but the plan was blocked by hardliners in George W. Bush's administration who rejected any right of Iran to process uranium, Gareth Porter reports for Inter Press Service.

By Gareth Porter

France and Germany were prepared in spring 2005 to negotiate on an Iranian proposal to convert all of its enriched uranium to fuel rods, making it impossible to use it for nuclear weapons, but Britain vetoed the deal at the insistence of the United States, according to a new account by a former top Iranian nuclear negotiator.

Seyed Hossein Mousavian, who had led Iran's nuclear negotiating team in 2004 and 2005, makes it clear that the reason that offer was rejected was that the George W. Bush administration refused to countenance any Iranian enrichment capability, regardless of the circumstances. Mousavian reveals previously unknown details about that pivotal episode in the diplomacy surrounding the Iran nuclear issue in memoirs published Tuesday.



Mousavian, now a visiting research scholar at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, had been a top political aide to former president Hashemi Rafsanjani and head of the foreign relations committee of Iran's Supreme National Security Council during his political-diplomatic career in Iran.

Mousavian had been entrusted with Iran's most sensitive diplomatic missions, including negotiations on a strategic understanding with Saudi crown prince Abdullah in the early 1990s and with U.S. officials on Afghanistan and Al-Qaeda in 2001 and 2002, his memoirs reveal. But he was arrested by the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad administration on charges of "espionage" in April 2007.

The British and U.S. refusal to pursue the Iranian offer, which might have headed off the political diplomatic crisis over the Iranian nuclear program since then, is confirmed by a former British diplomat who participated in the talks and former European ambassadors to Iran. Mousavian writes that one of the European negotiators told him that "they were ready to compromise but that the United States was the obstacle."

The episode occurred a few months after an agreement between Iran and the British, French and German governments on Nov. 15, 2004, on terms for negotiations on "long-term arrangements," during which Iran agreed to maintain a voluntary suspension of enrichment and other nuclear activities.

The agreement to be negotiated was to "provide objective guarantees that Iran's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes" as well as "firm guarantees on nuclear, technological and economic cooperation and firm commitments on security issues."

But the EU objective in the talks was to demand a complete end to all Iranian enrichment. At the March 23, 2005, meeting in Paris, the EU called for an

indefinite suspension of enrichment by Iran, meaning suspension beyond the negotiations themselves.

At the same meeting, Iranian negotiators submitted a proposal that included a "policy declaration to convert all enriched uranium to fuel rods" and "committed to getting the Additional Protocol," which would allow the IAEA to make snap inspections on undeclared facilities, ratified by its parliament.

Conversion of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to fuel rods only usable for power plants could have provided a guarantee against using the enriched uranium for nuclear weapons.

Iran did not have the capability to fabricate fuel rods, so the implication was that the LEU would have to be shipped to another country for conversion or would have to be done under international auspices within Iran. Once the fuel rods were fabricated, it would be practically impossible for Iran to reconvert them for military purposes.

Peter Jenkins, then the British permanent representative to the IAEA and a member of the British delegation to the Paris meeting with Iran, recalled in an interview with IPS, "All of us were impressed by the proposal."

The European delegations asked for a break to discuss it among themselves, Jenkins recalled, but soon decided to tell Iran they would "need more time to consider further." But the Europeans did not seek to explore the Iranian offer further.

Mousavian reveals that Iran learned a few weeks after that meeting that the Europeans had no intention of negotiating any agreement that would allow Iran to have any enrichment program.

On April 12, 2005, Mousavian recounts, the French ambassador to Iran, Francois Nicoullaud, told him it was impossible for the Europeans to negotiate on the Iranian proposal. "For the U.S. the enrichment in Iran is a red line which the EU cannot cross," Mousavian quotes Nicoullaud as saying.

In June 2009, Nicoullaud signed a statement with five other former European ambassadors to Iran recalling that in 2005 "Iran was ready to discuss a ceiling limit for the number of its centrifuges and to maintain its rate of enrichment far below the high levels necessary for weapons," but that "the Europeans and the Americans wanted to compel Iran to forsake its enrichment program entirely."

Jenkins recalled that he was aware that no proposal, no matter how forthcoming on assurances against diversion of LEU to a nuclear weapon, would be acceptable to the British government if it involved a resumption of enrichment. "I knew in

my heart of hearts that this was a waste of time that it would not fly," he recalled.

"The British objective was to eliminate entirely Iran's enrichment capability," Jenkins said. "I remember we couldn't even allow Iran to have 20 centrifuges for R&D (research and development) purposes, because we ourselves had mastered the technology with even fewer than that."

The Iranians had made clear to the European Three that they could not agree to any loss of their right to enrich, according to Jenkins, but the Europeans hoped that it was merely an opening negotiating position.

"I don't think we realized fully in March 2005 that Iran was not prepared to give up enrichment as the price of a settlement," Jenkins recalled. "We believed that if we could come up with sufficient incentives and scare Iran with the threat of referral to the (United Nations) Security Council, they would give in."

After reading Mousavian's minutes of the meeting with Nicoullaud, the Supreme Leader instructed his nuclear policy coordinator, Hassan Rowhani, to restart the uranium conversion facility at Isfahan. Iran had included the conversion facility in its suspension of enrichment activities only with great reluctance under the pressure of the European negotiators.

Meanwhile, Mousavian made the rounds to try to persuade the Europeans to accept an Iranian offer to ensure that it would not divert uranium to nuclear weapons. He recalls offering his German counterpart Michael Schaefer in Berlin yet another proposal that had not yet been cleared by Iranian leaders.

Under the Mousavian proposal, Iran would have resumed uranium conversion at the Isfahan plant but would have exported its product to "an agreed-upon country" in exchange for yellowcake, the form uranium takes prior to enrichment.

At a later stage of the proposal, Iran would have begun enrichment at Natanz with some 3,000 centrifuges, but again would have exported all the enriched uranium to "an agreed-upon country".

While those extraordinary arrangements were being carried out, Mousavian proposed, negotiations on a "final compromise" on "objective guarantees of non-diversion" and EU "firm guarantees" on comprehensive relations with Iran would continue for a maximum of one year, and that Iran would adopt a timetable for enrichment agreed upon with the EU "based on Iran's fuel requirements".

Schaefer encouraged Mousavian to pursue the proposal with the French and British, and French political director Stanislas Lefabvre Laboulaye told him it would

depend on the British response. But Mousavian writes that British director general for political affairs John Sawers told him that the Bush administration “would never tolerate the operation of even one centrifuge in Iran”.

After his round of meetings with the Europeans, Mousavian was informed by Rowhani that the package he had proposed had been accepted by the Iranian leadership, based on a minimum of 3,000 centrifuges and a one-year limit on the negotiations. But a third condition was that the Europeans had to agree on the plan before the August Iranian presidential election.

The third condition suggests that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei did not want either of the two presidential candidates, Hashemi Rafsanjani or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to get credit for the agreement with the Europeans.

The conversion of the bulk of Iranian low enriched uranium (LEU) to fuel rods after being exported to France or Russia was the basis for the Barack Obama administration’s diplomatic proposal to Iran in October 2009.

The Ahmadinejad government negotiated with the U.S. and European diplomats on the proposal, but in the end Iran was not willing to part with as much as 80 percent of its stockpile of enriched uranium without getting any change in U.S. policy in return.

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