

Barbarians within our gates

The radical right is assaulting the very concept of modern civil society.

by Jack Hughes

As the Republican Party demonstrated by their recent government shutdown and debt-limit extort attempt, politics-as-usual is no longer in effect. But the Republicans' political extortion was made even worse by their shamefully dishonest public statements to justify their acts -- actually attempting to shift the blame for the crisis on the Democrats.

When destructive policy is combined with denials of responsibility it demonstrates a "consciousness of guilt." These guys knew what they were doing was harmful to the economy and lied about it to avoid blame, yet they proceeded anyway.

The Republican-manufactured shutdown and debt-limit crisis -- and their dishonest justifications for it -- is but one example from the Republican agenda that has inflicted incalculable economic harm on the vast majority of Americans. Since the introduction of the Republicans' tax-cutting "supply-side" economic philosophy, America -- and Americans -- have become poorer by every measurable standard.

While the failures of "Reaganomics" are apparent by anyone with even a cursory knowledge of economic statistics and trend lines, the economic interests of the American middle and working classes have been completely ignored in favor of the narrow interests of the richest 1%. There are two reasons for this:

1. Under our corrupt political system of "legalized bribery," moneyed interests have been allowed to literally write tax and trade policies favorable to the plutocracy at the expense of American labor.
2. There is a percentage of the American population that is virtually ungovernable; hyper-individualistic, aggressively confrontational, tribal in outlook, and resistant to any form of public action in the common interest that does not provide them direct, immediate personal benefit. They object to government assistance to "others" while greedily scooping it up for themselves. They grouse at the expense for the common good, such as roads, bridges, public schools and water projects. In short, they oppose "civil society" or civilization itself.

Well-intentioned, civic-minded citizens understand that life is better for us all when we act together for the common good on issues such as public health, scientific research, national infrastructure, education, etc. We care for the sick and disabled, and provide for the unemployed not just because it's the "civilized" thing to do, but because we understand that we ourselves are not immune to such factors. Furthermore, we all understand that tax money is required to fund the government, and that paying taxes is a civic responsibility like voting and jury duty. These are the basic assumptions of a functioning civil society. It's called "citizenship."

But what do we call those who do not share these basic assumptions? Those unable to function within the norms of a civil society are said to be "uncivilized." Another term for "uncivilized" is "barbaric."

For a generation the Republican Party has been on an anti-tax jihad. Through changes in the income tax code, corporate profits that used to be shared with employees are now concentrated in the hands of CEOs and shareholders. After the Bush tax cuts exploded budget deficits, Republicans dishonestly described the rising national debt to be the result of "over-spending" and used it as an excuse to attack the Social Security and Medicare "entitlements" they always opposed -- even while advocating additional tax cuts.

Republicans have a term for this policy: Starving the Beast. Grover Norquist famously said he wanted to shrink government to a size where he could drown it in a bathtub. By doing so, they are preventing the functioning of our national civil society. Tax cut by tax cut, our national infrastructure is crumbling, our manufacturing base is wasting away, education costs that had been subsidized by states have been shifted to students -- burdening them with unprecedented debt, and the American middle class is being reduced to neo-feudal peasantry. For all of their complaints about the national debt, Republicans never mention the pertinent fact that it was their tax cuts that are most responsible for its growth. What no Republican will ever admit is that for budget purposes, there is no difference between "over-spending" and "under-taxation."

Just as the barbarians sacked Rome, America's barbarians are stripping the nation's wealth and destroying what they can't steal. The barbarians are not just looting the treasury, they're also at work in the nation's boardrooms. Leveraged buyout pirates engage in legalized theft, looting healthy companies of their assets and leaving debt-ridden husks. Profitable corporations ditch their employees' pension plans -- and other debt obligations -- into dummy corporations, forcing them into bankruptcy and screwing their workers out of their retirements. All perfectly legal.

While the Republicans shutdown of the government was dramatic, their attack on taxation is merely a slower, more pernicious means of government shutdown. Depriving the government of taxation is depriving the government of the means of exercising the majority's political will. The de facto Republican agenda is, and has been, the prevention of governance. They defend the indefensible by cranking out outrageously, ridiculously, false propaganda. And our news media -- in its quest for "balance" -- affords the barbarians' lies as much respect as if they were honored truths.

Even with their egregiously dishonest propaganda, and even with the corporate news media's blasé reaction to it, the barbarians find it difficult to maintain a "civil" tongue and voters have already begun to rectify their great mistake of 2010. In a democracy, the ballot box should offer corrective measures against this long steady assault on the majority's interests. But where the citizens have been lazy and apathetic, the barbarians have been busy. The barbarians use their votes as a weapon in their war against civil society. When that doesn't work the barbarians have made it difficult for good citizens to remove them from power through vote-suppression schemes -- and when that fails they simply steal elections. What, does anyone expect civilized behavior from barbarians? Just look at what they did in 2004 by hijacking the Ohio vote for George W. Bush, and with it the presidency.

Since the rise of the barbarians there have been so many questionable election results -- especially after the introduction of easily hackable paperless electronic voting machines -- that exit polling is no longer a reliable predictor of "official" election results without an automatic ~5% point shift to Republicans that pollsters refer to as "Red Shift." Rational "civilized" people, i.e., pollsters, pundits, journalists -- and even the Democratic candidates and their supporters that have been robbed in these elections -- have passively accepted a new theory offered to explain this new, historically unprecedented, statistical phenomenon; that today's Republicans are more reluctant to respond to exit polls than Democrats -- rather than face the existential challenge posed by the simpler and more obvious explanation.

Since the Gingrich Revolution, the barbarians have disguised themselves, put on expensive suits, and learned to appear "moderate" and "reasonable" when on TV, making everything appear as "business as usual" while our national inheritance has been plundered. But now, with the rise of the Tea Party, the masquerade is over. The Tea Party feels insulted and betrayed when Republican politicians, for the sake of actually winning general elections, hide their barbaric nature and true agenda by pretending to be "reasonable." The Tea Party will have none of that, instead demanding that all Republicans must proclaim -- loudly, publicly and proudly -- their barbaric militancy, hatefulness, stupidity, paranoia and self-delusion for all to see. Any Republican that won't give them that good old-fashioned tribal demagoguery will suffer a primary loss to an ambitious goober who will.

Even though the vast majority of the barbarians will never profit personally from the wholesale sacking of their own country and are themselves among its victims, they enthusiastically support the economic pillaging. They may have become poorer, but they're happy because they've got their guns. Barbarians love their weapons. Guns are their highest priority. The barbarian chieftains in their executive suites and warlords on AM radio have exhorted their tribes to armed vigilance, since their guns represent the last "final solution" to the imposition of any form of civil society -- and they're ready. The barbarians have their guns and they would just love an excuse to use them.

For America's barbarians, the only "civil" behavior they will gladly endorse is civil war.

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