

Social Progress in America – an Outsider’s Impressions

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The spectre of political strife has always been America’s firma. But political tactics tantamount in consequences to violence against the well being of the political process have never been written into the modus operandi of the two major political parties. At this time, the Republican leadership is doing exactly that.

This leadership is reaching for radical tactics, far outside the time-tested limits of American politics, in their attempts to undermine Obama’s presidency. They condone, if not institutionalise, party propaganda that involves repetitious use of lies about persons and the misstatement of facts, engage in negotiations with no real intent to compromise, and apply tactics that the Senate’s minority leader, Mitch McConnell, proudly claimed a “hostage taking”. With reckless intent, the Republican leadership condones state-level moves to narrow the ranks of eligible voters. As I see it, their action amounts to nothing less than an assault on democracy in America.

The brazen performance of Republican leaders comes on the heels, and makes worse the unbalance in the distribution of America’s wealth and political power. By their actions America is polarised and the Nation’s highest political forum paralysed. In proportions with this, America is losing face with trusted allies, and the country, with it the entire world, is slipping deeper into economic and political chaos. If this goes on much longer, the losses America will have to absorb - in prestige, power, and money - will be colossal.

Democrat Barney Frank speaks of the “Republican war on reality”, but he still considers the Republican tactics the misguided act of a naive group of meddlers, cheered on, in Barney Frank’s words, by a defiant “know-nothing crowd”. But the good man misses an important point. John Boehner and his group of Republican leaders are anything but naive meddlers. They are executing a meticulously planned political scenario. They know exactly what they want and they know how to get what they want.

Boehner and his group are proving themselves highly talented strategists determined to eradicate all vestiges of tax-based social service in America. They reason, the financial burden involved is too heavy and it cannot be paid for without collecting more taxes from the rich of society and the big corporations.

The first blueprints for social progress started to take shape in the States one hundred years ago. President Theodore Roosevelt’s “Square Deal” is the first comprehensive agenda, aiming the average citizen to get a “fair share” of the national wealth. The “Bill of Rights” of Franklin D. Roosevelt gave Americans “Social Security”, and more, even the most ardent Tea party members would not want to lose. After many more reforms, Lyndon B. Johnson’s “Great Society” represented the largest social reform agenda since Roosevelt’s New Deal.

When the Democrats in Congress succeeded in 2010 to take American social progress to a new height by enacting the Obama healthcare law, the far right saw this in purely monetary

terms as the last straw, to be fought tooth and nail, to prevent their cherished dream of American society returning to the romanticised state - minimum government, no taxes (for the rich), privatised healthcare (for all), no real union power, and no state supported education - going up in smoke.

The Republican leadership understands very well that they have to crush Barack Obama's chances for winning in 2012, in order to achieve their objective. And this leadership is willing to vogue the good health of the population on it.

Republican plans are ready to hand health care back to private companies, which operate on a business model of maximised profits, not minding the devastating effects of excluding millions from the main stream health care system. The plans are tantamount to making a 180 degree turn back to the much despised conditions that private insurance force upon the population.

Republican leadership intends to channel more and more of the nation's wealth into the coffers of the mega rich. This leadership intends also to strengthen the grip of that stratum of society and the Big Corporations on national economic decisions, financial regulation, public representation, and anything else that may be coveted by them.

The Republican tactics are remarkably successful at this stage in their fight to stop social progress. The question is what to expect when the lawmakers return to Washington in September.

The Republican leaders see more than ever the utility in party propaganda, amounting to misrepresentation of facts and repetition of already refuted claims over and over again. One may wonder if these leaders realise that they are reaching back in history to Soviet style propaganda tactics - as once practiced by the likes of Vyshinsky, Molotov and Gromyko in negotiations with the West, labelled amoral by presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, and in the most vociferous terms by President Reagan. No one should doubt the Republican leaders' continued use of party propaganda.

An equally potent destructive weapon in the Republican arsenal is their legislative power in the House. They use this to create crises and, as they say, to take "hostages". The Republican leaders committed themselves to using legislative power the same way to make the presidency of Barack Obama appear an "unmitigated failure".

As regards the presidency, the youthful idealist President, Barack Obama, was easy prey for the politically seasoned, battle scared Republican leaders. Obama fell into their trap when he allowed himself to be drawn into lengthy negotiations that were designed by the republicans to take him "hostage". Obama let himself be painted as a weak leader, not deserving a second term in the White House. Emboldened by the results, the Republican leadership will surely continue exploiting this line of attack as they push even harder for winning the 2012 elections.

Should Obama fail to show to the American public the true face of the Republican agenda and explain clearly the potential consequences, the Republican Party will win the presidency and possibly both houses of Congress in 2012. But the brunt of the consequences by a Republican victory will have to be borne by those 50 to 80 million people who are in the low economic strata and millions more in the middle class.

Social security and health care will be privatised. Millions of children will be left poorly educated. The economically deprived will be treated as pariahs, and as such, will be excluded from the political and economic life of main stream America. Does this scenario paint a future not much different from what we see left for the economically deprived in developing countries?

Should Obama manage to break out of isolation by clearly explaining what the Republican leaders are doing, and what will be the necessary consequences of Republican action, he may win the presidency for a second term. Social progress will have been slowed, but the Democratic achievements will be consolidated.

No sane person should expect a helping hand from the sizable extreme right. They will continue dreaming of an America in a bygone era.

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