

Engineering The New Stockholm Syndrome

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(Reflections On the Tea Party Phenomenon)

It's one thing to bite the hand that feeds you. It's quite another thing to eagerly feed the mouth that bites you. The Tea Party phenomenon is fascinating for the following reason: Corporate power has somehow managed to convince the very people it seeks to—for lack of a better term—*fuck over* to enthusiastically endorse the policies that *favor* corporate power.

Thus, Tea Partiers have rallied around the very policies that caused their present affliction: unhindered financialization, ever-lower taxes on the super-wealthy, evisceration of ROTA for banking / Big Business, and further dissolving of PSI. The Tea Partiers cheer for these horrific policies—having been given the impression that THESE are the policies that will somehow help them.

In their minds, right-wing policy has been equated with FREEDOM. Meanwhile, progressive policies (i.e. policies that actually WOULD actually help them) are equated with “tyranny” and Soviet-style “communism”. Any real solution to their problems is now depicted as *the enemy*. The ruse has been a resounding success with respect to the uneducated, angry, and credulous segments of the American population. For such people, genuine understanding has been replaced with an orgy of queer stigmatizations and convoluted word associations.

How did corporate power manage to pull off this outlandish stunt? Indeed, it is nothing short of a heist—a hijacking of the psyche of the rank and file. The explanation for this astounding feat is quite straightforward: The efficacy of the right-wing propaganda machine.

The rabble has been incessantly inundated with well-designed propaganda—orchestrated by moneyed interests. Those at Tea Party rallies have swallowed it all: hook, line and sinker. The joke, of course, is on the Tea Party apparatchiks. That they've succumbed to an analogue of Stockholm Syndrome would never occur to them. As far as they're concerned, they're fighting the good fight.

The strategy employed by the plutocrats is simple: Instead of forcing corporatist policy down the throats of the rabble, *persuade the rabble to embrace it*. This can be accomplished by giving the most credulous and ill-informed segments the impression that corporatist policy is their salvation...and anything that might actually improve things (notably, stimulus spending and investment in PSI) is patently evil. The scheme is all about packaging: Simply put the poison pill into easily-digestible pieces of candy. Meanwhile, dress the medicine up as some toxic substance—a nasty thing to be avoided at all costs.

Naturally, the rank and file are unhappy with the horrific consequences of right-wing economic policy. It's just that many of them are unaware that the destructive policy is RIGHT-wing policy. The rank and file is now experiencing the fall-out from decades of Neoliberal economic ideology permeating the government. Consequently, they are seething with resentment. In other words: They're perfectly primed for further exploitation. All that anger has to go SOMEWHERE. If you can't stop the locomotive, simply reroute the tracks.

If the object is to get people to now ENDORSE the cause of the disease that now afflicts them (Neoliberal ideology), the key is to somehow convince them that any alternative (progressive fixes) is what they have to blame for their woes. Their anger can be channeled—diverted from the source of their problems to the source of their remedy. PSI and ROTA are thus depicted as “Big Government” and “Government Control” and other menacing, nasty-sounding things. “Get the government off our backs!” they yell at the top of their lungs...under the impression that they’re saving themselves from some tyrannical threat.

It’s like reaching for more booze in order to alleviate the pain from a hang-over...while blaming the glass of water (now being offered) for the headache. Who’s selling the booze and demonizing the water? Those who benefit from the alcohol businesses’ doing well. “Blame the one offering the water; just drink more alcohol and the pain will go away.” Most people have no time to have the physiology behind their hang-over explained to them by the doctor. They’d rather listen to those who are marketing the booze.

Now, if one were to talk to a typical Tea Partier, one will hear vacuous statements about “Big Government” and “Taking our country back” ...and inane pleas about “getting government off our backs” and “resisting communism”. Even though progressive taxation entails LESS taxation for the lower and middle classes, while offering them MORE help, they insist that progressive policies will RAISE their taxes and subject them to some sort of Soviet-style tyranny. They’re angry, and they’ve found SOMETHING to be angry AT.

Why is this? How could so many people possibly become so misled? It’s simple: They have been persuaded to *fixate exclusively* on the possible dangers of highly concentrated power in the form of STATE power. That is, they are (rightfully) concerned about problems with highly concentrated power in the form of state power, but have been rendered utterly oblivious to the OTHER form of highly concentrated power: PRIVATE power. Therefore, they run away from the boogeyman of some contrived *government leviathan* ...while being completely unconcerned about the corporate power transplanting it. It doesn’t occur to them that highly concentrated power comes in both state and private forms.

The manufacturing of the boogeyman is simple: Portray PSI as CONTROL OVER the people—as opposed to EMPOWERMENT OF the people. Thus, Tea Partiers will run away from the very thing that would help them (PSI) and eagerly—if unwittingly—play right into the hands of the very Big Business interests that have caused the problems they now have.

People are (rightfully) concerned about being exploited—especially by systems of top-down control. They associate such bad things solely with hypothetical tyrannical governments, not with the corporate power that’s actually the problem. So...they flee the former even when it isn’t there...and run willingly into the arms of the latter. The irony is astounding.

The Tea Party project is one of the biggest scams in political history. And, for millions and millions, it has been tragically effective. The people who’ve been taken in by the Tea Party mania/hysteria have—essentially—embraced their rapist while vilifying those who offer help. The only way to instill such people with some sense of Reality is to dump a bucket of ice-cold water over them—presumably by somehow INFORMING them of what’s really going on.

Most of them, however, will refuse to listen. The Stockholm Syndrome has taken full control.

ENGINEERING STOCKHOLM SYNDROME: MOBILIZING THE RIGHT WING:

Getting angry at the fire fighters for not putting out the fire fast enough is one thing, but to then turn to the arsonists for salvation is nutty...*especially* when it's the arsonists who—after setting the fire—erected roadblocks between the fire station and the burning house in order to impede the fire department's efforts to extinguish the flames! But rally a crowd around their cause *the arsonists have*.

Such a bait-and-switch is a stunning thing to behold. People are understandably angry when their house starts burning down. The key is to ensure that such angst is channeled in productive ways, and not used against them by those who stand to gain from the continued conflagration. The fact of the matter is: Arsonists can rally the crowd around them *even as the house burns*. In times of tribulation, people will look to those who provide the illusion of certainty, who exude confidence and righteousness, who deliver a simple, catchy message with confidence, who offer something solid to hold on to.

Sometimes, one must wonder how people can be duped, en masse, in such an efficient way. Most right-wing movements have been able to mobilize support for iniquitous agendas using hype generation and extensive propaganda—appealing to people's hopes while tending to their fears (even if in an utterly fraudulent manner). Hitler is the most well-known example of this feat, but there are plenty more: from Pol Pot to Lenin / Stalin to Mao to—yes—Glenn Beck. But this doesn't explain how such well-orchestrated machinations can be preemptively thwarted. Human credulity (and the penchant to indulge in dogmatism) will always exist; ignorance will always be there to be exploited. Society can strive to address the ubiquitous human susceptibility to be hoodwinked by charismatic demagogues—but psychological vulnerabilities can only be mitigated, not eliminated.

The tactic of misdirection is staggeringly effective. One need only witness the stagecraft of a savvy magician to see how staggeringly effective it can be. For a crowd that is kept unaware of what's "really" going on behind the scenes, a good performer can convince them that up is down and down is up. When people are fixated on what's going on in front of the curtain, they'll cease to be concerned about what's going on behind the curtain. The key is to captivate them with the goings-on on the stage—and it will never occur to them that *the arsonist* actually the fire...while it's *the fire department* that will prevent the house from burning down.

When we see crowds of people rally around the right-wing agenda in the wake of the economic disaster CAUSED BY right-wing policies, it seems we've entered a Kafkaesque realm. In the fallout from the catastrophe precipitated by Neoliberal ideology, Neoliberal apologists were somehow able to persuade the ill-informed that MORE Neoliberalism was just what the doctor ordered.

"The fire needs *even more* gasoline!" corporatists convinced the credulous. "WATER is to blame for your burning house. The fire department is the ENEMY. Pay no attention to their claims that the barrels of gas deposited throughout the house had anything to do with the fire getting out of hand. You were using too much WATER, doncha know?!"

The metaphor couldn't be more straight-forward:

- Replace "gasoline" with "corporatism" (i.e. deregulation and corporate power).
- Replace "water" with "ROTA and basic public infrastructure".

The metaphor becomes poetic once we recognize that gasoline represents corporate power...while the fire department is an appropriate representation of basic public infrastructure.

THE TRICK:

JOHN DOE MANIA

The key to ruling over a compliant rabble is simple, as oligarchs have known since time immemorial. It is to somehow persuade people—en masse—**to revere those who exploit them**. The masses will thereby glorify those who hoard all the power—instead of asking WHY they have the power and to what end they’re actually using it. Such inquiries, if done competently, would lead to rebellion.

In such a scenario, instead of questioning the established order, the masses will covet it—cling to it as their source of security, as the way they can make sense of the world. They will lionize those who dominate them—and do so under the illusion that they’re paying tribute to *their own* empowerment. Instead of challenging the incumbent power structure, they’ll be grateful for it.

Demagoguery is a sly trick. It’s a matter of getting crowds of people to gleefully endorse their own subordination. When this project is well executed, the masses will eagerly rally around the rulers with gratitude—making heroes of oligarchs.

The oligarchs are well aware of this scheme, and will thereby enact measures that engender such “false consciousness”. Such a feat can be accomplished once the masses become convinced that their masters are worthy idols—mentors that should be praised, leaders that should be followed.

In the event that oligarchs can pull off this P.R. stunt, they’re rendered celebrities: figures to be fawned over. Here, the oligarch is revered for his power rather than resented for it. The masses WANT him to be in his position of power, because they see that state of affairs as something that benefits EVERYONE.

The ploy works as follows:

If the aspiring oligarch is named John Doe, then there simply needs to be a significant amount of “John Doe mania” orchestrated. A *cult of personality* is invariably formed around John Doe, replete with marketing campaigns and signature John Doe branding. Engineering an appealing image (and generating hype around the “John Doe” name) play a crucial role in this process.

When the endeavor is successful, the master comes to be construed as a mentor—a CHAMPION OF THE PEOPLE—as opposed to a detached aristocrat. The illusion is often quite intoxicating. Instead of being subjected to critical analysis, the oligarch is—as a general rule—showered with praise. (Doing otherwise becomes *heretical* in the public psyche—warranting ostracism. Reverence for the oligarchy becomes a matter of official protocol—something each person does “for his own good”.)

Rulers of the ancient empires pulled off this stunt with staggering aplomb—as did Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot. Adolph Hitler and Kim Il Sung pulled it off to an even greater degree. The African “Big Men” did so as well. In today’s culture, every politician needs to play the same game—to greater or lesser degrees. Using the same mentality, corporate titans are celebrated as the greatest examples of success—revered for their rise to power and accumulation of wealth—as if they epitomized what it was to truly flourish. Plutocrats are seen as *archetypes for humanity* rather than as...well...plutocrats.

How can so many people be duped with such ease?

To ask this jarring question is to simply engage in the following inquiry: How is it that so many can be so thoroughly persuaded to play along with such a patently iniquitous charade?

There are other ways to pose this question: What is the appeal of this perverse narrative—a narrative that enables so few to hoodwink so many? What is so enticing about a status quo in which a handful of well-

positioned opportunists are allowed to hold sway over how things are for everyone else? How can a cabal of Machiavellians get millions—nay, HUNDREDS of millions—to go along with an agenda that benefits the former at the expense of the latter? Do we live in a world of suckers?

We find ourselves in a culture governed by short attention spans, a paucity of critical thinking skills, and a chronic fixation on the petty / superficial. We dwell amongst an ill informed, mentally lazy, perpetually distracted, passive-minded populace. It is no wonder, then, that a pseudo-oligarchy is allowed to persist. Millions of credulous, un-educated people were duped into joining a movement that pushed a corporatist agenda—all the while under the impression that they were fighting for the empowerment of the rank and file. This “Tea Party” movement hoodwinked crowds of resentful, disoriented civilians into thinking that they were standing up for the rights of the individual...even as they rallied around policies that favored corporate power.

This is mind-boggling to those of us who are paying attention.

During political campaigns, why do we cheer for candidates so vociferously? After all, this impassioned stridency regarding PEOPLE makes no sense LOGICALLY. For they're merely fellow civilians applying for a job as a PUBLIC SERVANT. A careful, discerning evaluation need not involve the pomp and pageantry typically seen in elections. The President is seen—and treated—as pseudo-royalty. We often forget that *he works for us*: the citizenry is his boss, his employer. Yet, a cult of personality often forms around high officials. Statesmen are rendered demagogues—celebrities to be fetishized.

It's all theater. It's a presentation meant to keep the rabble IN LINE. It's a performance intended to keep the masses placated. The trick, then, is to create a spectacle: to keep people amused and distracted. This way, people are rendered spectators rather than participants—kept under the illusion that by being CHEERING FANS they're participating in the game itself. Thus, if their team wins, THEY win. (Here, the analogy with profession sports fandom is obvious.)

The result of all this is that we don't live in a genuinely democratic society—if by “democracy” it is meant *participatory, deliberative democracy*. We live in what is essentially a pseudo-plutocracy—yet we persist in the comforting illusion that we live in a genuine Republic. This ruse works splendidly well for the plutocrats—who are thereby allowed to continue the established order under the auspices of preserving the “freedom” of the rabble. It is a well-orchestrated sham from which a few well-positioned figures can benefit handily. As things currently stand, the plutocrats rig the system for their own favor...*and then the rest of us thank them for it*. Many are captivated by the pomp and pageantry provided for us—embracing it all as though such things could ever be replacements for a society that was actually equitable.

John Doe mania persuades millions to embrace those who exploit them, and even *revere* the very figures that perpetuate such a dysfunctional state of affairs. Heroes include the likes of Donald Trump, Rudy Giuliani, Jack Welch, Dick Cheney, Ronald Reagan, Rupert Murdoch, the Koch brothers, Alan Greenspan, Henry Kissinger, Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, William F. Buckley, Steve Forbes, Catholic Pontiffs, and other examples of humanity at its most degenerate. We buy pulp trash but the truck-full in a woefully misguided effort to become edified. Millions of people read books like “The Secret” and “The Purpose Driven Life” and publications by radical right-wing pundits and celebrity gossip magazines and tabloids...then wonder why our society is so dysfunctional.

More people know about Oprah Winfrey than, say, Daniel Ellsberg. Which has done more for society? (Hint: certainly not the first.) We talk about Sarah Palin more than about Thomas Paine.

The most potent weapon of the covert oppressor is his ability to manipulate the mind of the obviously oppressed—to manage the thinking and the perceptions of those he exploits. “John Doe mania” WORKS...so long as we live in an intellectually impoverished culture. “John Doe mania” will always work...insofar as we allow ourselves to be distracted by the petty and irrelevant, to be seduced by images and stagecraft. “John Doe mania” will continue to be effective for as long as we can’t tell the difference between erudition and charlatanry. It’s why those like Mao and Pol Pot were able to rise to power...and why blithering idiots are often elected to high political office here in the U.S.: Mayors, Governors, Senators, Congressmen, and even Presidents.

One can tell a lot about a culture by the kinds of heroes the people in it tend to have. Here in the U.S., it’s time to change things.