

Neoliberal Newspeak

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INTRODUCTION:

Reciting the right-wing catechism is nothing new for right-wing politicians and political pundits. Scripted talking points are designed to sound enticing to the untutored ear—even as they obfuscate the underlying meaning. In this way, fatuous claims can be made to sound eminently plausible to the target audience. One need not resort to theories of neuro-linguistic programming to recognize that modes of articulation shape how people think. It is common sense that a limited vernacular constrains people's capacity to not only find answers, but to *even pose good questions*. If one doesn't even have the linguistic tools to ask the right questions, one can't hope to find the answers to those questions. A rigged lexicon, therefore, can sabotage people's ability to engage in the critical thinking necessary for participatory, deliberative democracy.

Understanding this basic principle, propagandists choreograph the narrative—thereby dictating the boundary conditions of the discourse. They recognize that one need not manipulate people's thinking directly in order to control how they perceive things. One need only engineer the possibility-space within which people's thinking takes place. For example, it would never occur to a Neoliberal acolyte to ask about the difference between the fiscal multiplier for State investment in public works and the fiscal multiplier for tax-breaks to the super-rich. For he isn't even aware of the concept. It's not that he's answering the question wrong; the mere posing of the question isn't in the cards. The terms on which such a critical inquiry is based aren't even part of his linguistic repertoire—part of his conceptual scheme. As a consequence, in his mind, any proposal based on trickle-down economics makes perfect sense. Why wouldn't it?

What makes this “trick” so potent is that it can happen without revealing itself. Scripted thought processes often masquerade as independent thinking—an impression that keeps people oblivious to their subservience—ignorant of their ignorance. By controlling the language games to which people habituate themselves, *manipulated thought* is delightfully misconstrued as *free inquiry*. People are none-the-wiser—and so they are perfectly content to persist in the illusion that they're NOT being controlled. It's like the shopper who's “freely choosing” to squander his money on consumer products he really doesn't need.

That strategically structured language can be used to manage how people think is a consequence of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Though the Sapir-Whorf theory as a whole has been found to have significant flaws, the present point has credence: One's language toolbox delimits one's thought processes.

The corollary of this theory is straight-forward: Insofar as we can dictate what's in the toolbox, we can guide how people will tend to think about certain things. After all, people can't formulate worthwhile inquiries about issues when the issues can't be articulated properly in the first place. If the articulation of a problem is not in one's repertoire, then no inquiries can be formulated in order to solve that problem. (In fact, the problem is not even SEEN AS a problem.)

In the end, it's not so much that people aren't getting the right answers to important questions; it's that they don't even have the wherewithal to pose the right questions. They're often not even aware that there are certain questions in need of posing: What are neighborhood effects? What are structural inequalities? Etc. In such cases, people unwittingly take the assumptions on which their paradigm is predicated *as given*. (They do this simply because that's all their language games allow them to do.) Insofar as these language

games can be orchestrated, people's thinking can be heavily influenced. This is how some people STILL believe in the promise of supply-side economics...or that corporations should be afforded civil rights as if they were humans. According to their myopic conceptual scheme, this makes perfect sense.

The propagandist's primary role, then, is to be the impresario of the prevailing language games. There is no better way to indirectly control people's thinking than to control the language they use. It comes as no surprise, then, that Neoliberal Newspeak is found throughout our public discourse—even by those who disagree with Neoliberal ideology. Neoliberals have set the terms in which the debate transpires—thereby ensuring that even Progressives cast their arguments in terms of the rigged language games amenable to right-wing sophistry.

Each buzz-word employed in Neoliberal apologetics is a well-crafted, market-tested euphemism. Such euphemisms are employed by right-wing economic ideologues in order to make their policies sound noble, even though the policies entail things that most people would never endorse if it was described accurately. In a way, this is diabolically brilliant. But, if we look at other fraudulent belief systems, we find they dress their hogwash up in plausible-sounding catch-phrases: Scientology, astrology, theology, homeopathy, and every imposter science that has ever existed. To the untutored ear, it all sounds credible.

BACKGROUND:

We'd be just as well advised to base our economic policies on astrology as on Neoliberal ideology. In fact, astrology may well be less absurd a basis for economic policy, as it is not explicitly designed to screw over the rank and file in order to benefit a cabal of plutocrats. The destructiveness of corporatism (and the supply-side policy it touts) has been put on display for all to see—its dire consequences presently being endured by the entire country (following the crisis of 2008). On its own terms, free market fundamentalism sounds fantastic. Why wouldn't it? It is a magnificent distillation of the conceptual scheme it offers—in the same way that the claims in Dianetics seem eminently plausible once one accepts the seductive language games of Scientology.

That we are now (as with 1929) experiencing the fall-out from right-wing economic policy is quite clear to anyone who's been paying attention. How, then, one might ask, could any sane person possibly continue to endorse right-wing economic policy? The explanation is relatively straightforward: Propaganda. What makes propaganda work is mis-direction, obfuscation, half-truths, and the invocation of alluring language.

This is demonstrated by the verbiage in the material churned out by right-wing propaganda factories like The Club For Growth, The Business Roundtable, The Chamber of Commerce, Americans For Prosperity, The American Enterprise Institute, The Heritage Foundation, Americans For Tax Reform, etc. The current breakdown of Neoliberal Newspeak accounts for almost every phrase that one will find in the material issuing from these sources. Listen to a Republican politician speak, and one will find that he can't say anything—ANYTHING—without using the semantic sleights-of-hand enumerated below. Deprive him of this rhetorical repertoire, and his sophistry collapses.

Alas, people are kept blithely unaware of the meanings of the words with which they've become infatuated over the last three decades. It's gotten to the point where those regurgitating right-wing talking points don't understand the words coming out of their own mouths. (But gosh golly, do they love the sound of what they say!) Blah, blah, blah LIBERTY. Blah, blah, blah PROSPERITY. Blah, blah, blah GOVERNMENT TAKE-OVER!

Observe two examples of Neoliberal Newspeak:

1) Euphemistically labeling the estate tax—a crucial tax in any democracy—the “death tax” (as if the tax was on a PERSON'S DEATH, as opposed to on an inherited estate). The estate tax only affects the

richest .2% of the population. That it doesn't affect 99.8% is omitted from perorations about being viciously oppressed by a menacing "death tax". That is only affects the already super-wealthy children of the most affluent families isn't mentioned in Neoliberal polemic because then people might actually recognize how the estate tax makes perfect sense.

2) Calling the State's protection of consumers (specifically, measures to prevent big corporations from exploiting vulnerable civilians) "a government take-over" or "socialism". Any description designed to frighten those who are credulous and un-informed will do. The inference here is comic when actually spelled out: If we enact ROTA over huge investment firms, it will deprive the rank and file of economic freedom!

It is commonly known that when one can't argue against the merit of the idea itself, one often resorts to re-labeling schemes in order to provide the illusion that a plausible case against the idea is being made. Consequently, the game played by right-wing ideologues is quite simple: Assign certain unsanctioned ideas menacing labels. That is: Wield well-crafted rubrics so as to negatively stigmatize any idea one wants to marginalize. It's easy—and the scheme is tremendously effective for those who don't know any better.

Such semantic shenanigans are essentially an attack on WORDS—using demeaning terminology under the auspices of presenting an argument against the *target concept*. The tactic is analogous to an ad hominem attack (whereby one demeans *the person* when one can't argue against the idea he's presenting). Credulous, ill-informed, reactionary-minded audiences will be persuaded by such sophistry. They will swallow every word without regard for the actual ideas being promoted. The actual ideas are obfuscated by the enticing rhetorical flourishes.

Neoliberalism promotes plutocracy—but plutocrats *can't say that*. So to get people to go along with their agenda, they simply need to fiddle around with phraseology: make horrible ideas sound enticing while making good ideas sound nefarious. They say "rationing" about public infrastructure and social services...when, in fact, rationing is what happens in the privatized systems like the FPSTI we currently have. They say "out of control" government, which merely means the State funding basic public infrastructure and providing vital social services (i.e. measures to help the weak and vulnerable in a well-orchestrated way).

These Orwellian games generally go un-noticed by the MSM. In each case, something wonderful (and integral to democracy) is made to sound destructive. Meanwhile, something deleterious to democracy is made to sound wonderful (and integral to democracy). This bait and switch involves some disingenuous semantic tweaking. To those of us paying attention, the translations of Neoliberal Newspeak are relatively straight-forward. The linguistic machinations involved in right-wing rhetoric will no longer work the day people understand the words they're using.

A SURVEY OF THE ORWELLIAN VERNACULAR:

As Orwell's INGSOC illustrated, by using Newspeak, untutored minds can be persuaded to support an agenda that—if they understood it—could never possibly be sold to them. Wherever marketable phraseology can be engineered, credulity and ignorance can be exploited. The goal of this exercise is to deconstruct Neoliberal Newspeak, thereby revealing the underlying meanings it aims to obfuscate...and thus exposing right-wing talking points as a linguistic scam.

Here are 10 alluring terms employed to make bad ideas sound good, and 10 scare-terms employed to make good ideas sound bad. Observe: what is actually SAID...and what it really MEANS.

1) **“Freedom” / “Economic freedom” / “Liberties”**

“Freedom” is a snazzy term: emotionally loaded and contentious. It is often used to label “freedom for corporations” as opposed to “freedom for human beings”. The crucial distinction goes unmentioned simply because the point is to promote the former in the guise of the latter. Plutocracy can be promoted so long as it is done under the pretense of promoting liberty for the rank and file. What the real message is doesn’t sound as palatable: The rank and file must be left to take care of themselves in a draconian marketplace. This means that the affluent are “free” to consolidate their wealth...and everyone else is “free” fend for themselves.

“Economic freedom” is also a way of saying that corporate power should be able to operate without ROTA. Here, so-called “economic freedom” is freedom for Big Business to do what it sees fit in order to maximize its profits.

The Neoliberal paradigm is predicated on restricting the notion of freedom exclusively to NEGATIVE rights, and thus utterly disregarding the crucial role of POSITIVE rights in any democratic society. A myopic conception of the State’s role in society is thereby instantiated—rendering people averse to notions of the government working to provide positive rights to the common man.

This amounts to exhortations to “keep the government out of the way” (so that the super-rich can get their way). This deranged request for “liberty” operates on the assumption that what’s good for the super-rich is beneficial to the rank and file. To fail to see the nutty-ness of this assumption (after the disastrous fallout from Neoliberal economic policies) is to have gone down the Rabbit Hole, Through the Looking Glass, and into some bizarre state of neurosis. No reasonable person would take this line of sophistry seriously if they actually understood what it entailed. History has shown that the perversion of the word, “liberty” is ubiquitous in right-wing movements. The idea is that you will let me dominate and exploit you, so long as I claim that I’m doing it in the name of your “liberty”. I’ll screw you over—and you’ll thank me for it.

2) **“Small businesses”**

Big Business. This is a euphemism for corporate power, and rarely refers to businesses that are by and for “the little guy”. The idea here is simple: Give enormous tax-breaks to large corporations and to the super-rich, and we’ll just call it something appetizing, like “helping the small businesses of our country”. In reality, of course, demand-side policies and having the State (instead of businesses) provide healthcare is what would help small businesses. What corporatists don’t want everyone else to know is that the tax-cuts for the super-rich and gaping loopholes for Big Business do NOT benefit the rank and file: all that money remains in the hands of a privileged few. The catch: the State foregoes gigantic avenues of revenue, thereby forcing it to either de-fund public infrastructure and social programs...or engage in deficit spending. (Funny how that works.)

3) **“Prosperity”**

This is a buzz word employed ad nauseum. Generally, it is a euphemism for “unchecked corporate power”. It amounts to “prosperity for the most affluent...at the expense of everyone else”.

This iniquity is rationalized by spreading absurd myths about “trickle down” effects...while touting the laughable fiction that financial wealth is a barometer for how productive someone is in society. No one paying attention could possibly take such contentions seriously. (For more, see my essays on MMM Syndrome.)

4) “Tax-cuts”

This typically means “tax-cuts for the supr-rich” and / or tax-breaks for large corporations. Such doublespeak was demonstrated when Obama initially cut taxes of 98% of the general population, yet balked at extending the tax-cuts for the super-rich. Tea Partiers were up in arms for Obama NOT giving *them* “tax-cuts”—as if not giving huge breaks to billionaires was some slight against everyone else.

In this piece of rhetoric, perfectly reasonable taxes on the most wealthy and on Big Business is conflated with (harmful) taxes on the rank and file. This is done by simply calling all of it “taxes on the American people”. So long as the rabble don’t know the difference, they’ll cheer along anyone who wants to cater to corporate power.

5) “Cut government spending” / “Spending cuts”

This means avoiding desperately-needed ROTA while de-funding crucial social services and basic public infrastructure. “Spending cuts” here simply means cutting investment in public works. In other words, it means cutting things that don’t benefit the super-rich, but play a crucial role in the common good.

Meanwhile, it involves NEVER cutting funds to the military-industrial complex, the prison-industrial complex, the petrol-industrial complex, the agri-industrial complex, or the intelligence / security-industrial complex (i.e. things that abet corporate power and only help the rich become richer—while not contributing at all to the common good). “Cutting spending”, then, is often a pretense for cutting vital public investment.

In this scheme, so-called “desperately-need spending cuts” don’t involve reducing massive corporate subsidies. Nor does the measure involve trimming the ridiculously-bloated Pentagon budget. Instead, it involves depriving the rank and file of access to crucial public goods (like public education and public healthcare) that not only help people, but stimulate the economy from the demand side. What Neoliberals don’t mention: It is almost entirely from the DEMAND side that the economy is stimulated. Supply-side economics has never worked. The last three decades have clearly shown that the benefits accrued by the super-rich from these tax-breaks don’t trickle down to the rank and file.

This duplicity works by disregarding the fact that the fiscal multiplier for investment in public works is consistently higher than the fiscal multiplier for favors to corporate power and the super-rich. So the Neoliberal sales-pitch is: “You NEED to cut public investment in order to fund these huge favors to the super-rich so that the super-rich can create jobs. If the super-rich aren’t allowed to keep all their money, then everyone will suffer.” This is hogwash. Taxing corporate jets, yachts, dividends made from wealthy speculators, and massive estates does NOT inhibit job creation...nor does it deter innovation and entrepreneurship. All it does is allow the country’s most affluent to hoard more money for themselves, even as everyone else is deprived of basic public infrastructure.

Corporatists insist on continuing to spend public money on corporate socialism (socializing costs while privatizing profit) even as the rank and file is deprived of any measure designed to ensure the general welfare. Thus, social programs for the rank and file are cut in order to fund tax-breaks to Big Business and for the nation’s most affluent. Meanwhile, any government spending that benefits the super-rich is protected from these “cuts”. Not only is this unfair, it is bad for the economy.

Noble-sounding calls to “cut out-of-control government spending” essentially mean “de-fund crucial social services and allow basic public infrastructure to deteriorate”...all while ensuring that there is no ROTA for investment banks and large corporations. Put this way, it suddenly doesn’t sound so good, does it?

Whenever a Neoliberal says, “Cut spending”, he means “cut spending on public works, but NOT on the military-industrial complex...and NOT subsidies to Big Business.” In other words, it’s food-stamps that

are “out of control”, not the military-industrial complex.

The demand is allegedly made to address deficit spending, yet it is made without addressing the mountains of revenue that the State foregoes when it issues gigantic tax-breaks (and even tax exemptions) for large corporations and for the super-rich. Obviously, if ameliorating deficit spending were the goal, cutting corporate socialism while no longer foregoing obvious sources of tax revenue would be the first two things on the to-do list. Alas, corporatists insist that NOT giving massive tax-breaks to the super-rich would be “hurting job creators” and “discourage entrepreneurship”...and that NOT giving massive tax-breaks to Big Business will somehow “deter innovation” and “impede capital investment”. **This has all been proven to be un-true.**

The translation of Neoliberal pleas for “spending cuts” is simple: We must deprive the rank and file of basic public infrastructure and crucial social programs in order to fund massive tax-breaks to the nation’s most affluent that the nation’s most affluent don’t need.

6) “Free enterprise”

This is a captivating buzz word that is disingenuously used to refer to *unchecked corporate power*. This is an endlessly reified term that insinuates that for-profit businesses are the ideal way to provide ALL things in society—including education and healthcare. It entails avoiding any ROTA that may help identify and curb the most egregious abuses of corporate power. This evasion is perpetrated in the name of “economic freedom”. Moreover, this enticing term is used as an excuse for corporate power to conduct itself in patently anti-social ways. *Even when* making record profits (and *even when* receiving enormous tax-breaks, tax-exemptions, and tax-payer-funded subsidies), corporatists complain that Big Business is still somehow being fettered and hampered and inhibited and debilitated by ROTA—blaming any problems afflicting the rank and file on the inability of Big Business to behave however it sees fit. This is a naked lie. It is a perversion of the term “free enterprise”, and nothing other than a pretext for highly-concentrated private power to run amok.

7) “Private sector solutions” / “Free-market solutions” / “Market-based solutions”

Anything that will abet corporate power. This involves allowing the financial sector to operate without ROTA...while trying to privatize everything under the sun. The scheme promotes policies that will encourage speculation. In the Neoliberal depiction of the world, the so-called “free market” is seen as a Shangri La of freedom, meritocracy and prosperity...rather than an incubator for highly-concentrated private power and a recipe for appalling inequalities.

According to most historians, the Harding and Coolidge administrations’ “free-market solutions” (nothing other than an unregulated free-for-all that precipitated hyper-speculation) was the key factor that led to the Great Depression. This was a time characterized by obscene corruption, union-busting, and feudal-like wealth inequalities...not to mention the total collapse of the American economy. Similar policies under G.W. Bush lead to the collapse of 2008. Now that our economy was almost destroyed by “free market” policies, the right wing insists that what we need are MORE “free market” policies. The key is to CALL these policies something noble-sounding...like “free market solutions”.

“Business solutions” generally means the privatization of as much public infrastructure as possible—selling public works off to the highest bidder. The gambit typically amounts to corporate socialism. Privatizing everything under the sun, operating everything as a for-profit venture, seeing citizens are target customers, and treating public education and public health as consumer products: this is the blueprint for the Neoliberal Valhalla. The appeal of such a proposal is a consequence of fetishizing the free market. The promise is that, if everything were run as a BUSINESS, then people would tend to pay less. Of course, the exact opposite is typically the case, as has been proven by the FPSTI and the prison-

industrial complex.

Such free-market apocrypha is untenable, yet persists because it plays such an integral role in serving the dubious interests of corporate executives, speculators, investment banks, and the politicians they own. Such utopian visions serve as a smoke-screen, based on the farce that investing in public infrastructure or in ROTA will somehow constrain (or even deter) the legitimate business activity germane to a healthy economy. (For more, see my essays on Neoliberal myths.)

8) “Limited government” / “Small government”

This is probably the most vacuous buzz word in the corporatist’s Orwellian lexicon. It essentially means: “A State that does everything we *want* it to, but does nothing that we *don’t* want it to.” The thinking here is as follows: If the State does ANYTHING of which we don’t approve, the State becomes a *bad* thing—something we’ll call “big government” (where “big” is used to insinuate some overly-bureaucratic, over-reaching monstrosity). Meanwhile, when we use the State to siphon tax-payer money into the coffers of well-connected businesses, we’ll call it “capitalism” or “the free market in action”.

- Gigantic military-industrial complex? Wonderful—so not a matter of “big government”.
- Colossal exercises in corporate socialism? Fine—so it mustn’t be considered an instance of “big government”.
- Anything to protect consumers and laborers? NOT fine—ergo deemed a menacing example of “big government”.
- Anything to help the disenfranchised, the weak, the sick, or the poor? NOT fine—so another case of “out-of-control government spending”.

The game is quite simple. Bigger in YOUR way entails some tyrannical Leviathan. Bigger in OUR way is, well, perfectly acceptable...so we won’t call it “big government”. This is doublespeak at its most flagrant. Ironically, it is primarily the things that corporatists champion are precisely the things that make the government so un-necessarily gigantic. Go figure.

The way in which this sabotages the audience’s thinking is by rendering an assessment of government exclusively in quantitative terms—thereby precluding any qualitative assessment. How “good” a government is, then, corresponds to its position on a big-small spectrum. If Soviet-style tyranny and North Korea are “big” government, well, then, it only stands to reason that the “smaller” a government is, the better. Right? After all, the problem with Nazism was that it was BIG. The way to ensure democracy, then, is to make government SMALL. Get it?

9) “Austerity measures” / “curbing the deficit”

This is code for gutting vital social programs and de-funding basic public infrastructure. Such measures are carried out in order to subsidize massive (needless) tax-breaks for the super-rich and for Big Business.

“Getting spending under control” means “eliminating spending that doesn’t suit the interests of our corporate paymasters”. When a corporatist says anything about “austerity measures” or “curbing the deficit”, he means, “Getting spending *we don’t like* ‘under control’ while maintaining the exorbitant government spending that abets the moneyed interests we serve.” The general welfare be damned.

10) “Job creators”

This is code for two things:

- The super-rich.
- Large corporations that outsource jobs to foreign lands (places that offer cheap labor and little if any ROTA).

In other words, it refers to those who aren't "job-creators" in the way that the buzz term implies. This linguistic sleight-of-hand is predicated on the myth that the most affluent are the most productive, and if they are allowed to hoard as much of their fortune as possible, their largesse will be used to create jobs. This is part of the myth of "trickle down" economics. Alas, it has been demonstrated over and over and over again that allowing the most affluent to avoid taxes does *not* create more jobs...and most super-rich people use their money not in noble enterprises but in schemes designed to simply make more money for themselves.

10 SCARE TERMS:

Just as it is used to "sell" people on *bad* ideas, Orwellian shenanigans are also used to frighten people away from *good* ideas. Scare-terms always come in handy when one is dealing with the un-informed and credulous portion of society. Get the rabble to fear the things that plutocrats don't want, and the rabble will be convinced that **THEY** don't want those things either. Here are five cases in point:

1) "Big government"

This scary-sounding term is bandied about to the point of distraction. But what does it mean? Presumably, it means, "Anything other than the government activity plutocrats say we should want." In other words, this menacing rubric simply refers to state oversight of corporate / banking activity, consumer protections, labor protections, and funding for basic public infrastructure and vital social services. Meanwhile, all the thing that *actually do* make government too big are the very things corporatists insist are necessary—so none of THAT is part of what makes "big government" *big*. The perverse part is that what corporatists want are things that only benefit the corporatists...while what they accuse of being "big government" are the things that are actually needed by the rank and file. This taxonomy works splendidly if you're interested in plutocracy.

So long as the government only does what plutocrats want it to do, then it can be called "limited government". After all, "limited government" sounds so much more appealing than "big government". So the labels are assigned as needed. At the end of the day, people tend to fixate on labels, not scrutinize the nature of that which is actually being labeled. So people will eagerly take poison from a bottle labeled "medicine" while eschewing any medicine in bottled that have been labeled "poison". The poison peddlers win, and the victims will thank them for the favor.

Indeed, if we were to describe things for what they actually are, people may recognize the merit of each item—which would not bode well for the corporatist agenda. We could spell out each policy proposal based on what it really entails, but Neoliberals simply won't have this. So they must invent menacing-sounding rubrics like "big government" in an attempt to caricature something genuinely good as something we should avoid.

How democratic a government is more a matter of qualitative, not quantitative, assessment. Democracy can be measured qualitatively, and has little to do with "size" of government. Attempts to couch a State's legitimacy on a big-small spectrum are tremendously misleading. We should heed James Madison's insight: "It is a melancholy reflection that liberty should be equally exposed to danger whether the Government has too much or too little power." Liberty requires the State, which alone can protect the individual from systems of exploitation,

domination, and marginalization. Only the State can guard against intrusions from powerful private institutions.

Progressive ideas are good ideas, so no sound argument against them can be offered as an indictment. Neoliberal polemicists are consequently forced to resort to negative stigmatization in order to scare people away from “unapproved” proposals. To do this, they need only create a menacing label in place of a sound argument...and proceed to attack the label rather than the idea. “We’re here to fight against big government!” is an eminently marketable claim—because it sounds wonderfully noble. Who can argue with THAT?

Other empty labels can be used in place of “big government”: “nanny state”, “welfare state”, etc. All of them only mean what the speaker desires them to mean. These vacuous terms are all used as if a State were to only be assessed on a quantitative scale—as if State legitimacy could be gauged on a big-small spectrum—a one-dimensional metric of SIZE. This is, of course, an absurd way to assess the role of a State.

Within Neoliberal polemic, there is a panoply of misleading terms—wielded like weapons—used to demonize PSI, create suspicion (and even paranoia) about the public sector, and foster a neurosis about THE STATE. The strategy here is simple: Divert peoples’ attention away from possible concerns about PRIVATE power, and make them fixate on the possible dangers of STATE power in worst-case-scenarios. (When is the last time we heard a polemicist for free-enterprise candidly discuss the dangers of HCP in the form of PRIVATE power?)

2) “Government take-over” / “Government control”

Here, EMPOWERMENT OF the People (via State programs) is depicted as government CONTROL OVER the People. This menacing catch-phrase leads people to believe that any measure designed to help the rank and file is really just a diabolical plot to take over their personal lives. Thus, when someone hears, “We want to provide you with universal public healthcare”, they only hear, “We want to deprive you of your freedom.”

A so-called “government take-over of medicine” refers to universally-accessible, affordable healthcare provided by the State—the way it’s done in most advanced, democratic nations (at far less cost with much better results). It’s a no-brainer, but according to Neoliberal doublespeak, one would think that universal public healthcare was tantamount to government tyranny. Of course, *nobody* likes “government take-overs”, as the notion brings to mind tyrannical regimes doing illiberal things like dominating and exploiting people, while rationing care (i.e. precisely what the system we NOW HAVE does).

The strategy here in simple: If audiences can be convinced that a public service is a “government take-over” of their lives, then everybody will dread it, and nobody will want it. (After all, who wants the big, bad government to “take over” their life?!) Depicting UPH as some maniacal scheme to deprive people of liberty is the trick. Meanwhile, depict the FPSTI that we currently have as the basis of freedom—and claim that the horrible inefficiencies and iniquities we currently experience are due to the fact that the FPSTI *isn’t privatized enough*.

It isn’t difficult to frighten people away from the obvious solution. Basically, any menacing-sounding label will do—a rubric that creates the impression that, if we do X, then *the government will take over our lives*...where X is any social services or piece of public infrastructure. In reality, of course, such an X has nothing whatsoever to do with government “controlling” anyone’s life (or intervening in anyone’s personal affairs). But that fact doesn’t prevent Neoliberal polemicists from insinuating otherwise.

&p;lt;p class="MsoNormal">When enough people can be persuaded that crucial social services and basic public infrastructure should be seen as nothing more than government intrusiveness, they can be persuaded to de-fund those things in order to pay for favors to the super-rich who don't depend on such things.

“Government takeover” is meant to lead us to believe that any measure the State takes to empower people, to provide opportunity, is the State intervening in our private affairs, and thereby undermining not only our prerogatives as individuals but undermining the ability of a free market to exist and private enterprise to thrive. Only by subscribing to Neoliberal Newspeak does this contention make any sense.

3) “Socialism”

This ubiquitous term is a scare-term used for various things—anything that involves State involvement in helping people. Mostly, it is the label Neoliberals assign to any scenario in which the State provides universal healthcare...or provides consumer / labor protections...or provides oversight of banking corporate activity. Thus, any effort to effect accountability and transparency (thereby mitigating abuses of private power) can be written off as “government infringement on the market” (a.k.a. “socialism”).

This way, anything where the public contributes funds to the State so that the State can foster the common good can summarily be deemed “socialism”. The fire department? Socialism. Street-sweepers? Socialism. Your child’s public school teacher? Socialism. The upkeep of roads, bridges and highways? Socialism. Waste treatment? Socialism. The municipal potable water system? Socialism. The FAA managing the nation’s airspace? Socialism. All of these things, then, are instances of “the government trying to control our lives”!

“Socialism” is a pejorative term for anything the State might do that corporatists don’t want anyone to like. (After all, isn’t “socialism” what Stalin and Mao were doing?!) Meanwhile, the socialism that *actually is* the problem is *corporate* socialism: the socialism that happens when Neoliberal economic policy is enacted. The irony is astounding. But with Neoliberal Newspeak, it makes perfect sense.

Investing in vital social services and basic public infrastructure is depicted as “socialism” (or even “communism”) by fueling the “government take-over” paranoia endemic to Neoliberals’ conception of *anything* the State does. The strategy is to frighten the people away from anything you don’t want them to have. It’s only socialism if it’s socialism for the POOR. Socialism for the rich is called “capitalism”.

4) “Re-distribution”

Another inane buzz word that doesn’t mean what the Neoliberal polemicists try to make it mean. In simple terms, they want it to mean: Taking MY money in order to give it away to somebody else. Sounds like government orchestrated theft! The term leads people to believe that making something “public” is a matter of TAKING from some (i.e. the most hard-working and productive in society) and using it to doll out hand-outs to the undeserving and lazy (i.e. the poor). That “public” simply means allocating the part of the fruits of economic activity to crucial public services for society-as-a-whole, then, is forgotten.

Consequently, there is no recognition that, in a democracy, there are certain things to which all people should have equal access, regardless of socio-economic status.

The concept of “publicly subsidized” X is anathema to the Neoliberal ideologue. The “re-distribution” gripe is typically voiced by those who see every X—no matter what it is—as some nefarious plot to install a Soviet-style tyranny in Washington D.C. They see the provision of a *public good* as some diabolical government Leviathan TAKING money from the productive, the hard-working, the job creators...and *dolling it out* (as hand-outs) to a mob of thankless, lazy, poor people: the moochers.

In other words, Neoliberals fail to grasp the very concept of government.

The concepts “the common good”, “general welfare” (as stipulated in the preamble of the Constitution), “socialized infrastructure”, “social responsibility”, and “public services” are intriguingly absent from the Neoliberal vision of utopia. They seem not to be able to grasp that people who share a community can all pitch in...in order to ensure that basic municipal services are made available to everyone in the community...by way of an efficient, non-profit, meta-market mechanism: the State.

“Re-distribution!” they brain-wash everyone to think in reaction to any measure by the State to facilitate the general welfare. Amusingly, what is never acknowledged in this ersatz indictment is the *other kind* of re-distribution: UPWARD re-distribution. Not only is upward re-distribution the re-distribution they don’t mention, but it is the re-distribution that is ACTUALLY HAPPENING...the re-distribution that is anti-democratic and even quite dangerous...and the re-distribution they do everything they can to facilitate.

The fact of the matter is that wealth distribution is always happening in *some way, somewhere, for some* reason, based on *some* policy. The question is: What direction is the re-distribution happening...and based on what criteria? For the corporatist, every policy must foster UPWARD re-distribution—which *isn’t called* “re-distribution” because THAT is the re-distribution that suits them magnificently. Only when public funds are used for the common good, to help enfranchise people who need help, is it demonized as “re-distribution”.

Unmentioned is the fact that the real income of the rank and file has stagnated in the last three decades while the super-rich have gotten ridiculously, obscenely rich. To add insult to injury, it has been many of the super-rich who’ve often been the least productive people in society...and the most destructive. Oftentimes, it is the plutocrat who is mooching off the productivity of the working class.

Those who complain about “re-distribution”, and is referring exclusively to DOWNWARD re-distribution being a problem, are being stupendously disingenuous...or haven’t the faintest clue what they’re talking about. It is UPWARD re-distribution that has harmed our democracy so much—and only the corrective of egalitarian re-distribution that will help the rank and file get back on their feet.

Only in the Twilight Zone does this Neoliberal indictment make any sense.

5) “Un-American”

This amorphous epithet has been a favorite scare-term of the far right since WWI—and is reminiscent of other right-wing movements throughout modern history. The epithet simply means: Not in the way WE approve. In other words: The way WE want things done is, by definition, “American”...and anything else is, ipso facto, *against America*. It’s a wonderful way to discourage dissent.

(Here, replace “American” with “Patriotic”...appending the “un” as needed. Brand anyone who doesn’t agree to the desired agenda as “un-patriotic”, so as to enforce the desired terms of acceptable debate.)

The Orwellian games are endless. The key, then, is to expose the semantic shenanigans for what they are, thereby depriving the right-wing rhetoric of its misleading euphemisms.

6) “Entitlements”

Any measure the State undertakes to foster the common good.

Corporatists want us to believe such measures are a maniacal scheme for dolling out hand-outs to society’s

slothful and undeserving. This odd conception of “entitlement” disregards the role of positive rights in a genuinely democratic society: freedom from ignorance, sickness, and systematic exploitation / domination / marginalization. This entails a wiser, healthier, less exploitable, less dominate-able general populace...and thus a more productive, secure and happy general populace. A rank and file less susceptible to exploitation, domination, sickness and ignorance is precisely what a healthy deliberative democracy requires.

Making sure that the poor, the sick, and the disenfranchised are not left out in the cold to fend for themselves. This involves using public funds for the *general welfare* (a government role stipulated explicitly in the U.S. Constitution’s preamble). This is a matter of ensuring that all civilians have access to public goods (e.g. public education, public healthcare) irrespective of socio-economic status. (For more on this, see my essays on UAHQPE and on PSI.) Such eminently democratic measures can be made to sound extremely suspicious if they’re just called “entitlements”.

It is important to note that this menacing moniker does not refer to the entitlements that *are*, indeed, illegitimate: *corporate* entitlements. Such entitlements are the entitlements that *should* be cut—yet they are not *called* “entitlements” simply because corporatists want such public spending to continue. This is rationalized via the fraudulent theory, “supply-side economics”, in which the engine of economic activity is corporate power and highly-concentrated wealth, *not* the ability of the rank and file to thrive.

Those pesky “entitlements” Neoliberal ideologues complain about don’t include entitlements for the *privileged*—because *those* entitlements are perfectly wonderful...as far as the plutocrats are concerned. But the moment the State attempts to provide basic public infrastructure or vital social services for the rabble, we’re suddenly on the “road to serfdom”. Meanwhile, the mountains upon mountains of favors to corporate power aren’t “entitlements”. *Corporate* socialism is “capitalism”, after all. It’s any allocation of public funds that doesn’t benefit exclusively the super-rich that is “socialism”. Get it?

7) “Job-killing taxes”

This is a euphemism for ANY taxation—even taxes that HELP create jobs. That is, it often refers to taxes the create jobs by funding public works. The ruse here is typical: label the medicine “poison” and label the poison “medicine”. Why would one do such a malicious thing? When one benefits from people NOT taking the medicine...and when one benefits from selling the poison. In this case, people are made to think that NOT giving massive tax-breaks to the super-rich and to large corporations will somehow “kill jobs”.

But this is a lie. Such taxes have NEVER inhibited job creation, deterred innovation, discouraged entrepreneurship, or mitigated capital investment. Rather, such taxes have helped the rank and file by ensuring the most wealthy contribute some of their spoils to the common good.

Taxing corporate jet owners on their corporate jets doesn’t prevent their corporation from creating jobs.

Taxing gigantic estates doesn’t prevent entrepreneurs from being entrepreneurs. Taxing dividends on speculation doesn’t burden the economy in any way. Instead, what such taxes do is allow the fruits of economic activity to be channeled back to the general welfare by funding basic public infrastructure.

Neoliberals love to give frightening labels to any taxes of which the super-rich and large corporations don’t approve—in order to scare the working class away from progressive taxation measures that help the working class. The best way to do this is to lie.

Even though progressive taxation has NEVER hurt job-growth or caused unemployment, this scare tactic is used to make people believe that any taxation on the most affluent or on Big Business will “kill jobs”. Such measures, they insist, will augment unemployment by impeding entrepreneurship and dissuading businesses from investing in R&D. This is all, of course, hogwash. Progressive taxes HELP the economy, MITIGATE deficit spending, and help CREATE jobs...and have never impeded entrepreneurship or

dissuaded businesses from investing.

Of course, corporatists don't want public investment because public investment helps the rank and file instead of abetting corporate power. Public investment channels the fruits of economic activity back to the common good instead of allowing the super-rich to hoard their spoils. Corporatists don't want money in society to be allocated for the general welfare, so they're forced to lie in order to frighten people away from responsible tax policy and make supply-side economic myths sound plausible.

Supply-side economics has never worked, yet corporatists continue to peddle it as a magical solution. Instead of admitting the virtues of progressive taxation, corporatists obstinately insist that when the State taxes the affluent and Big Business at reasonable levels, it will "KILL" jobs for everyone else. All evidence is to the contrary, but they ignore the evidence and promote this lie with a straight face...so that the rich can become richer and corporations can evade taxes.

The fiscal multiplier for public investment has always been higher than the fiscal multiplier for tax-breaks for the super-rich. Whenever a corporatist calls something a "job-killing tax", one can be quite sure that it is a tax that will help CREATE jobs and bolster the economy for the rank and file. As is typical with Neoliberal Doublespeak, one need simply take the opposite of the euphemism in order to reveal Reality.

The demand: "De-fund basic public infrastructure and cut vital social services for the working class...in order to fund massive tax-breaks for large corporations and for the super-rich!"

The threat: "If you don't capitulate to our demands, then unemployment will soar."

The logic: "If the most affluent and Big Business are taxed, then jobs will be lost. Progressive taxation is punishing the job creators!"

All of this is balderdash. To the super-rich and the highly-profitable large corporations who refuse to chip in their fair share to the common good, the entire nation should say, "Shame on you. Enough's enough." Our economy isn't in trouble because we devote too much money taking care of people's health and providing food-stamps to the destitute. It's in trouble because we continue to be held hostage by corporate interests. Our economy will not be hurt if billionaires aren't allowed to hoard their entire fortune without giving back to the society that helped them accumulate that fortune in the first place.

The mendacity involved in this menacing term is evident when one looks at the facts: Progressives propose slashing the \$400 billion worth of tax breaks for oil companies, hedge-fund managers and owners of private jets, yachts and racehorses. They want to cap the gigantic deductions for families making over a quarter million dollars per year. They want to eliminate the gargantuan corporate tax loophole called LIFO.

NONE of this would hurt the economy. ALL of this would provide the State with adequate funds to invest in public works.

Instead, we have hedge fund managers paying lower tax rates than their file clerks, and corporate executives paying lower tax-rates than their secretaries, and highly-profitable mega-corporations paying almost NO taxes...even as the rank and file continue to suffer...even as public infrastructure crumbles...even as crucial public services deteriorate.

Alas, Grover Norquist’s Americans for Tax Reform have given millions the impression that ALL taxes are *inherently evil*. But there’s more: ALEC (The American Legislative Exchange Council), the AEI, the Club For Growth, the Business Roundtable, the Chamber of Commerce, the Heritage Foundation, Americans for Prosperity, and other Neoliberal operations adamantly refuse to endorse common-sense, pro-social tax policy. To convince the citizenry that eminently desirable tax measures are undesirable, right-wing propagandists simply label all of it “job-killing taxes”...and hope everyone swallows the unfounded claim.

Neoliberal ideologues deny demand-side economics the same way creationists deny evolutionary theory. No matter how much irrefutable evidence is provided to them, they will wave it away. When hyper-dogmatism is coupled with pathological obstinacy, even mountains of countervailing evidence is inadequate to fetter cognitive-dissonance-in-overdrive. Explaining to a Neoliberal that trickle-down economics is a sham is like trying to explain to a Wahhabist that perhaps Mohammed of Mecca wasn’t visited by an arch-angel named Gabriel. The mere notion that he might be mistaken is literally inconceivable. Neoliberals have sanctified supply-side nostrums the way Pentecostals have sanctified millennialism. It’s time the rest of us broke the spell.

8) “Rationing”

This scare-word insinuates that public goods are rivalrous consumer products, and thus ration-able. The implication is that the funding of basic public infrastructure and the universal provision of basic social services entails the diabolical installation of Soviet-style rationing programs. In reality, such measures are taken to facilitate genuine democracy: to afford universal access to the most fundamental public goods on which a democratic society is based. This is a matter of ensuring all people have access to certain things irrespective of their socio-economic status, thereby preventing any segment of the population from becoming unfairly disenfranchised.

9) “State planning”

This term is based on a deceptive portrayal of properly socialized infrastructure (i.e. investment in public works). It is used as if ANY planning was INHERENTLY bad, thus confusing the State’s coordination of basic public services...with...the State’s control over EVERYTHING. This is, of course, far from the same thing as a government-planned economy.

10) “Bureaucracy”

This scare-word is used as if the only kind of bureaucracy was a STATE bureaucracy, and private bureaucracies can’t be bad. Of course, the FPSTI (the very monstrosity corporatists strive to preserve) is the most hyper-bureaucratic, colossally inefficient leviathan in the United States. Having State-provided universal public healthcare would REDUCE bureaucracy and INCREASE efficiency. But that’s not part of the corporate agenda, so that isn’t mentioned.

PROPOSAL FOR AN EXPERIMENT:

Request that a Neoliberal apologist have a serious discussion about economic policy without using any of the buzz words listed above.

Depriving right-wing polemicists of their favorite catch phrases would handicap their sophistry—thereby requiring them to use a lexicon that isn’t conducive to their coveted worldview. Without recourse to their rhetorical flourishes, scripted talking points, and disingenuous semantic maneuvers, their arguments would be exposed as linguistic shams.

In such a scenario, Neoliberal apologists would be forced to form thoughts with terminology that actually has worthwhile meaning. Just by rendering the words enumerated above *off-limits*, right-wing boilerplate would be emasculated.

In this experiment, one of two things would happen. Either...

A) Neoliberal apologists would be forced to talk about CONCEPTS rather than throwing around provocative WORDS...or...

B) Neoliberal apologists would simply replace THESE buzz words with OTHER buzz-words. With the NEW euphemisms, they would simply continue their semantic games with a new arsenal of Newspeak.

With option A, they would no longer have at their disposal the rationalizations required to make their dogma sound credible. With option B, they would demonstrate that they're merely playing with words, and not dealing with sound arguments. In either case, the vacuous-ness of their verbiage would be exposed.

To take the experiment even further: First, give a speech (to a right-wing audience) using every catch-phrase enumerated above. Note how it elicits enthusiastic cheers. Second, replace each catch-phrase with its *actual meaning*, then re-give the speech (to a new right-wing audience). Note the difference in the reaction from the two crowds. Then ask: WHY the difference in perception?

SUMMARY:

Taking Neoliberal Newspeak seriously, one will be given the impression that if we provide social services for the rank and file, Soviet-style tyranny is around the corner...YET...hand-outs to Big Business is the magic of *capitalism in action*. The claims SEEM compelling on the surface. But what's going on behind the words?

How does this logic work? In a plutocracy, only plutocrats matter—and they dictate the terms in which any discussion of policy will be cast. Fountains of lip service is paid to the rank and file...even as the working class is relegated to subaltern status.

The rabble are notified that we all need to learn the harsh lessons of self-sufficiency. But what this really means is: “You’re on your own; if you can’t fend for yourself, that’s your problem, not mine. Tough luck. I’ve got mine; you get yours. Beware of government bureaucrats, but pay no heed to the abuses of highly concentrated private power. The more everything is privatized, the less of a role the State plays in empowering people, the better.” Those who buy into Neoliberal Newspeak will tend to swallow this sales pitch—hook, line and sinker.

The next time a right-wing polemicist lionizes “job creators”, gives soaring perorations about “economic freedom” and “prosperity”, warns about “government control” and “socialism”, bashes “entitlements”, accuses Progressives of “re-distribution” and “big government”, praises “free enterprise”, recommends “market-based solutions”, prescribes “austerity measures”, claims how he only wants to “cut spending” in order to “reduce the deficit”, and talks about helping “small businesses” and “job creators” by avoiding a “government take-over”, we should see through the rhetorical flourishes.

(That just about covers all G.O.P. boilerplate.)

Provocative semantic flourishes should never be allowed to obfuscate the underlying meaning of the verbiage. Supply-side economics has always failed, yet these linguistic shenanigans are used to hide this fact...while promoting dubious nostrums.

Not included in the approved vernacular are heretical concepts like “exploitation”, “marginalization”, “structural inequality”, “wealth concentration”, “fiscal multiplier”, “consumer rights”, “labor rights”, “equal access”, or “socio-economic stratification”. Such concepts, if comprehended, would upset the carefully choreographed conceptual scheme, exposing Neoliberalism as a sham, thereby undermining the corporatists’ agenda.

Omission of terms is just as important as making use of misleading terms. Point in case: “Corporate entitlements”. This is the kind of entitlement spending corporatists don’t want to acknowledge. It is therefore a term that doesn’t exist in the Neoliberal universe—along with *the other* kind of welfare, *corporate* welfare...and *the other* kind of socialism, *corporate* socialism. Welfare and socialism are only BAD when they’re designed to help the hoi polloi.

Corporate entitlement is the form of entitlement is the REAL “entitlement problem”. Yet this isn’t acknowledged by the right wing—as it wants to divert attention from this waste of tax-payer money, and fixate on a chimerical venality of public infrastructure and social services. It is utterly disregarded because such measures help the super-rich: those who fund the corporatist politicians—expecting those politicians to do their bidding. It is blasphemous to mention the “sense of entitlement” problem for the wealthiest Americans. Challenging private wealth accumulation is heresy in the Neoliberal universe.

Corporate entitlements include subsidies to the military-industrial complex, the agri-industrial complex, the petrol-industrial complex, the prison-industrial complex, the FPSTI, and to the banking industry. The war profiteers, Agri-Business, the big oil companies, the Pharmaceutical industry, the major insurance companies, and investment bankers in the financial services industry DEMAND these entitlements...and do so by *not calling* them “entitlements”. The double standard is quite flagrant.

How is it that tens of millions of people fall for these Orwellian shenanigans? Is it merely that they’re woefully uninformed? Stupendously credulous? Staggeringly oblivious? Monumentally ignorant? What we can say for sure is that Neoliberal Newspeak WORKS. That millions are egregiously ill-informed, then, should come as little surprise.

Right-wing think-tanks (propaganda factories like the AEI, Club For Growth, Chamber of Commerce, Business Roundtable, Heritage Foundation, Americans For Prosperity, etc.) generate the Newspeak. Right-wing media outlets serve as dogma promulgation vehicles, disseminating Neoliberal ideology. Relentlessly churning out, incessantly disseminating, and perpetually re-enforcing right-wing dogmas enables them to keep large swaths of the population dependably indoctrinated.

Roger Ailes’ “FoxNews” is an obvious example of this process. Not only does one have to be horrendously ill-informed to tune in to the station to begin with, but the programming ensures that the loyal viewer remains staunchly ill-informed *in perpetuity*. Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp empire operates so that tens of millions will be duped into playing along with the corporatist agenda. The target audience will be persuaded that serving the interests of the ruling class will somehow help the rank and file because the rationalizations offered are appealing.

This stunt can be pulled off by incessantly flooding the public discourse with the Neoliberal Newspeak outlined above. By ensuring that the rabble is constrained by an Orwellian vernacular, the Machine can exploit Sapir-Whorf-like effects—imposing constrictive parameters of discussion that straight-jacket people’s thinking and handicap the ability to ask important questions.

CONCLUSION:

The thinking of the common man can be managed by ensuring he may only avail himself of a rigged linguistic toolbox. The corporate-run MSM provides these tools—delivered in provocative, candy-coated packaging. Handicapped by a “loaded” lexicon, the audience ends up casting all thoughts exclusively in terms of the misleading catch-phrases. This becomes the only mode of articulation at their disposal, thus ensuring that any line of inquiry is amenable to the desired outcome.

By sabotaging the audience’s discourse, people are deprived of the ability to even pose the right questions. Anything that doesn’t comfortably fit within the anointed *conceptual scheme* is promptly stigmatized-to-death using the anointed vernacular. *Anything*—no matter how antithetical to democracy—that can be associated with the promised Valhalla can thereby be promoted as something desirable. For example, “Defense” sounds wonderful, because it brings to mind *security*...not the horrifically bloated military-industrial complex for which it is a euphemism. Thus, if we do something in the name of “Defense”, the mendacious war profiteers (who are siphoning tens of billions of public funds into their coffers each year) will be praised for “serving the country” and “protecting the homeland”. When perception trumps Reality, pretense is the most powerful weapon. After all, who can argue with something that’s done in the name of “national security”? Alas, a deconstruction of Neocon Newspeak is for another day.