

GOP Plans To Destroy Our Safety Net Will Also Kill Democracy

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December 22,
2016

Newt Gingrich [openly bragged recently](#) at the Heritage Foundation that the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress were going to “break out of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt model.” That “model,” of course, created what we today refer to as “the middle class.”

Ever since the election of Ronald Reagan, Republicans have been working overtime to kneecap institutions that support the American middle class. And, as any working-class family can tell you, the GOP has had some substantial successes, particularly in shifting both income and political power away from voters and towards billionaires and transnational corporations.

In July of last year, discussing SCOTUS’s 5/4 conservative vote on Citizens United, [President Jimmy Carter told me](#): “It violates the essence of what made America a great country in its political system. Now it’s just an oligarchy with unlimited political bribery...” He added: “[W]e’ve just seen a complete subversion of our political system as a payoff to major contributors...”

As Princeton [researchers Gilens and Page demonstrated](#) in an exhaustive analysis of the difference between what most Americans want their politicians to do legislatively, versus what American politicians actually do, it’s pretty clear that President Carter was right.

They found that while the legislative priorities of the top 10% of Americans are consistently made into law, things the bottom 90% want are ignored. In other words, today in America, democracy only “works” for the top 10% of Americans.

For thousands of years, economists and economic observers from Aristotle to Adam Smith to Thomas Picketty have told us that a “middle class” is not a normal by-product of raw, unregulated capitalism – what right-wing ideologues call “the free market.”

Instead, unregulated markets – particularly markets not regulated by significant taxation on predatory incomes – invariably lead to the opposite of a healthy middle class: they produce extremes of inequality, which are as dangerous to democracy as cancer is to a living being.

With so-called “unregulated free markets,” the rich become super-rich, while grinding poverty spreads among working people like a heroin epidemic. This further polarizes the nation, both economically and politically, which, perversely, further cements the power of the oligarchs.

Jefferson was acutely aware of this: the Declaration of Independence was the first founding document of any nation in the history of the world that explicitly declared “happiness” as a “right” that should be protected and promoted by government.

That was not at all, however, a consideration for the architects of supply-side Reaganomics, although they appropriated JFK’s “rising tide lifts all boats” metaphor to sell their hustle to (boatless) working people.

“Now in all states there are three elements: one class is very rich, another very poor, and a third in a mean. ... But a [government] ought to be composed, as far as possible, of equals and similars; and these are generally the middle

classes. ...

“Thus it is manifest that the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class, and that those states are likely to be well-administered in which the middle class is large, and stronger if possible than both the other classes, or at any rate than either singly; for the addition of the middle class turns the scale, and prevents either of the extremes from being dominant.”

This is [how America was](#) for the Boomer generation: a 30 year old in the 1970s had a 90 percent chance of having or attaining a higher standard of living than his or her parents. But, since the 1980s introduction of Reaganomics, there's been more than a [70 percent drop in “social mobility”](#) – the ability to move from one economic station of life into a better one.

So, if our democratic republic is to return to democracy and what's left of our middle class is to survive (or even grow), how do we do that?

History shows that the two primary regulators within a capitalist system that provide for the emergence of a middle class are progressive taxation and a healthy social safety net.

Tragically, Republicans are today planning to destroy both our nation's progressive taxation system and our social safety net, in obsequious service to their billionaire paymasters.

Flipping Jefferson and FDR on their heads, Republicans are proposing multi-million-dollar tax breaks for the rich, with a few-hundred-dollars bone tossed in for working people.

Meanwhile, Republicans are already hard at work.

[Thom Hartmann](#) is an author and nationally syndicated daily talk show host. His newest book is [“The Crash of 2016: The Plot to Destroy America — and What We Can Do to Stop It.”](#)