

Of Tea-Parties and Patriots: Liberty for Who?

Dave Strano

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The following article was written and directed towards members of the “Liberty Movement,” participants in the Tea Parties and Town Hall meeting protests. It was originally intended to be handed out at Colorado gun shows, where anarchists have done counter-recruitment against the Minutemen:

As town hall meetings on health care become the targets for disruptive protest and a growing “pro-liberty” movement gains traction and headlines, a full analysis of the situations we are facing as white working class people and an analysis of the strategies of the new “pro-liberty” movement is necessary.

I am authoring this piece as a white working class male that comes from a military family background, and identifies to some extent as being a libertarian. This description of myself is important as it helps color the perspective I am writing from, as any differences in my background, race, or socio-economic status would ultimately change the entire nature of this essay.

This piece is also mainly directed at white working class people that are active within this new movement. The reasons for this are many, as will become obvious as this piece progresses.

On race...

The Liberty Movement resembles the broader Libertarian Movement in a myriad of ways. One of these ways is in racial composition. To be plain and up front, the U.S. Right is mostly comprised of white people. These giant Tea Parties, our demonstrations and meetings are seas of white faces, with small sprinklings of nonwhite faces.

Whiteness is defined in many different ways by many different people. To many, Jews are not white. Up until the mid 1900’s, white skinned people of Irish and Italian descent were not considered white. Some folks still think this way.

I identify, for the benefit of this essay, a white person as any person with pale skin pigmentation that would commonly pass as white in this society. We don’t need to break this down any further. We know whether we’re white or not.

Most whites immediately become defensive when the word race is even brought up. We don’t want to admit we think in these terms. We don’t want to admit that race has anything to do with our lives or what’s going on in this country. We’d rather pretend it doesn’t exist and not talk about it.

We can act like Ostriches all we want. It doesn’t change that our movement is nearly completely white. Let’s admit that, understand that, and move on to understanding what that means for us.

On class...

When people bring up the term “class”, many white working people start to snicker. The calls of “leftist” or “socialist” or “pinko” come to the lips of many at the mere indication that someone may be conscious of class in America. Despite this tendency, especially within the ranks of poor and working whites, most white working people naturally view the world in terms of class, whether they’d admit it or not.

Our realities are shaped by where we stand socially, economically, and politically. The vast majority of whites, like people of all other races, live in precarious social, political, and economic realities. We live paycheck to paycheck. We live off over-extended credit. We live in debt. We

don't own much, if at all, in real estate. We live in stressful situations, where if one part of the chain breaks, we lose everything. Our very existence is one of insecurity and economic disaster.

Most people in the middle and upper classes of white society try to stifle this talk amongst us in the working or lower classes. Political, social, and church leaders try to erase the class line. But for those of us going home at night to trailers, slumlord owned apartments, or dilapidated houses, we tend to not forget the large suburban homes and mansions that these leaders sleep in.

Class exists. Just like race, we can't make it go away by ignoring it. But why would we even want to ignore it? Our situation as working whites boils down directly to the idea of class.

Our class interests...

I start with the idea that most white working class people want similar things. We, as most people do, want security, freedom, prosperity, comfort, and safety. We don't want to have to worry about where our next meal is coming from, how we're going to be able to afford school supplies for our children, or whether or not we will fall victims to a "terrorist" attack. We don't want to constantly fear losing our jobs or living the rest of our lives in precarious economic situations.

We now live in a country with a huge division between rich and poor. We live with a failed economy. We live in a nearly failed state. The government of the United States has systemically become a monstrous giant of bureaucrats and neo-tyrants. The whole government, every single politician, is part of this corrupt system.

Back home, in our communities, both rural and urban, we are losing our jobs. We are watching our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, dying in deserts and mountains halfway across the world. Our police forces are growing larger, just as our prison populations. We, as working people, are losing everything.

But, there may still be hope for us. White working class people are starting to organize on a national level for what we believe are our interests as a class, as physically manifested with the wave of "Tea Parties" and protests against what many feel to be an impending socialist nightmare in Washington, D.C.

Thousands have mobilized in past months to send clear messages to the politicians in charge of this mess that we won't take it anymore. And now, we're mobilizing to shut down what many see as a socialist attempt to take away our health care options and build even more government power.

But what do these mobilizations really mean? And what have we gained by disruptively protesting these town hall meetings on health care reform? Are we gaining ground? Or are we merely paving the way for further future losses?

Liberty

Typically, political scientists have defined the concept of liberty as a political idea that identifies that a person has the right to act according to their own will and desires. This is how many Americans would like to think about liberty.

At Tea Parties, political meetings, and other gatherings, most white working people keep this image of liberty, of true freedom, deep in their hearts. It tends to motivate how we view the rest of the world and our relationship to it. We see liberty manifested here in the U.S., and the founders of this country dying to ensure it existed.

The other liberty...

Let's be clear, however about the concept of liberty. We've all been duped, plainly and simply. On this land, the concept of liberty as defined in the previous context has never existed. In fact, we've had the wool pulled over our eyes so tightly, that we can't even see how the word has changed meaning and been used against us.

Historically, because of the conditions in the United States, the concept of liberty in this country has taken on a much different connotation than the one previously stated. Liberty, in the United States, has become synonymous with the protection of rights to own property.

To many within the white working class, this doesn't seem like a contradiction. Part of being able to determine our own wills and act in true freedom is being able to own property. We define freedom by the ability to own objects, to own land, to own cars, to own firearms. And we defend this right to own private property to the death.

However, the right to own property is the right that allows for the rich and elites to own everything that we produce. The right to property has become the legal and social basis for the rise in power of those that directly exploit us. Because it's a protected right to own water resources, because it's a protected right to own land that you will never live on or work on your own, because it's a protected right to own a house and price gouge your tenants for rent, because it's a protected right to own a business and pay your workers next to nothing, because we as white working people have helped protect these rights, we've laid the foundation for our own misery.

The concepts of freedom and private property, then, are at direct odds with each other. How can we be free when a corporation owns the rights to our water? How can we be free when a bank owns the land that our houses sit on? How can we be free when all of our food is owned by a field boss? How can freedom exist when a small minority own the very means of our survival?

We've become casualties of this way of thinking for centuries. The idea that property protection and liberty are one and the same has allowed for the rich, the political and economic elite, to swindle the rest of us.

In the name of freedom and liberty, we protect the right of 5% of the residents of this country to maintain ownership over 90% of the property and means of survival in this country. Modern liberty has become the freedom to starve, the freedom to lose our jobs without notice, and the freedom to have a bank take back its property from underneath us.

While the rich in this country pillage our paychecks, destroy our retirement funds, and take away our livelihoods, we gladly hand our resources to them. After all, liberty doesn't exist without the protection of these rich people to own that property. They have the right to even own us, in fact.

By its very nature, the concept of private property has destroyed us and allowed the rich to ride all over us.

And it's this thinking that has created and shaped our current "Liberty" Movement.

The Liberty Movement

The Liberty Movement, this new manifestation of centuries old U.S. patriotism, has spread across the country like a wild fire. Tea Parties, large mobilizations denouncing a rising “socialism” in this country, were held in cities across the U.S. in the Spring and early Summer.

New organizations on college campuses and within communities have sprung up to continue the organizing efforts. The main enemy is President Barack Obama. His policies resemble a socialist attack on the American way of life, and they must be stopped.

Led mostly by rich politically ambitious organizers these rallies have brought together thousands of mostly white working class participants to start to fight back against this onslaught from the left.

However, many contradictions appear within this framework. Thousands of white working people, people who rely on foodstamps, unemployment payments, and even welfare checks, fill the ranks at demonstrations calling for an end to social services. White working people, full of fear about socialism and an attack on “liberty” (in this case, an attack on the property rights of the rich) turn against their own interests and sell out their own needs to fight the new socialism.

The unpleasant reality for working class and poor people who have participated and still participate in this new movement, is that we’re being used by these rich leaders within the movement to protect their interests, not ours. But that’s nothing new.

A history of playing for the wrong team

The history of the white working class has been a history of being an exploited people. However, we’ve been an exploited people that further exploits other exploited people. While we’ve been living in tenements and slums for centuries, we’ve also been used by the rich to attack our neighbors, co-workers, and friends of different colors, religions, and nationalities.

Since the colonization of the Americas in the late 1400’s, white working people have been the footsoldiers of political and economic elites seeking to dominate and control land, resources, and wealth, all at our own expense.

We have enlisted in armies to slaughter indigenous peoples. We’ve been slave catchers to trap and enslave Africans. We’ve been police officers to terrorize communities of color. We’ve been prison guards to keep other working people locked up. We’ve been settlers, occupiers, colonizers, and conquerors. These roles have done very little to benefit us, on the whole. We’ve been used to benefit a small minority of politicians, bosses, and aristocrats.

The blunt reality is that for the last five hundred years on this continent, white working class people have been used by mostly white rich people to colonize for, kill for, work for, and then better the living standards of those same white rich people, all the while sacrificing our own needs, wants, aspirations, and even lives. It really is as simple as that. No one denies the history of what has happened at working people’s expenses. Wars, poverty, homelessness, wage slavery... these are all ills created by someone, and perpetuated by us... the same workers who suffer these ills.

For some five centuries we’ve been used by the rich among our own race to promote their agenda and suffered because of it. Yet, somehow, we’ve still been convinced that it is in our interests to protect the rights of the rich to own as much property as they can, to protect the

right of the rich to even exist, to protect these same rich people who would just as soon see us die for their benefit.

The heart of the matter is that for these five centuries, we've been too busy fighting the people who should naturally be our allies against these injustices. The rich whites have used our skin color against us, have used our human nature of fearing living beings different than us against us... they've used us against us. They've blinded us with these racist ideas of "white supremacy" and "white pride" and "white nationalism" into fighting other working people of other races, while they sit on the sideline and laugh.

The New Liberty Movement plays directly into this situation, and turns us, as white working class people, against our natural interests as working class people, and against our natural allies. We're still being used by rich whites to advance their causes, and lose everything that we desire and need.

Of socialism and healthcare

Let's be plain. Obama is not a socialist. His reforms and the reforms of other politicians are not socialist. They're not even radical. They're truly reformist. And they're truly state-capitalist.

Obama's policies have not threatened the power structures of this country in anyway. The rich will stay rich. The poor will stay poor. Property will still be just as protected as it is now. Wars will still be waged on multiple continents. The systemic inequities that have created a mess for all working people will still exist.

But while these reforms, like public option healthcare, are not radical and do not fundamentally change any power relationships in this country, they still remain important bread and butter survival policies for poor and working people.

Just like people of all races and backgrounds, most white working and poor people have no healthcare. We've seen it disappear. We don't have access to medical care when we need it. While national healthcare is not the answer to all of our problems, and shouldn't be our ultimate end goal, it is a short term fix that we, as working class people, could probably use.

However, the red flag of socialism has been waved in front of our faces. We can't see anything but the closet communist Obama taunting us and attacking our very way of life with these reforms.

And it's this mentality that divides us from nonwhite working people even more. The vast majority of nonwhite working people are in support of this healthcare reform. They are in support of social service spending. They are in support of legislation that affects their survival as working class people.

We're divided in a way that is fairly predictable. White working class people, people who have been bought off by the rich, would rather protect property rights that are used against us and our interests than work for healthcare and social services that we don't like to admit that we utilize and need.

In our class based, capitalist society, white working class people protect property, while non-white working people struggle for social services necessary for survival. And thus, we as white working people play for the wrong team. And in the end, everyone besides the rich and the politicians ends up losing.

Let's be honest. I don't want the government to control healthcare. But I also don't want to live in a property based society where I'm denied healthcare because I don't make enough money. Until we get rid of that property based economic relationship, then I'll gladly take social services from the state, just to level the playing field a bit between me and the rich boss that steals money from my paycheck, or the rich politician who guts money from our schools to fund occupations of other countries that benefit corporations he owns stock in.

Migrants and other scapegoats

Perhaps the most glaring example of how white working people are playing for the wrong team, and how the new Liberty Movement actively works against the liberty of all people, especially nonwhite people, is the role that the movement plays within the debate on immigration.

One of the attacks leveled at the government by the Liberty Movement is the government's failure to secure the border. The white populist logic of the movement becomes quite clear at these times.

We have bought into the ridiculous notion that mostly brown skinned immigrants from Mexico or other countries are our enemy, that they are somehow stealing our jobs, that they somehow really threaten us. Let's get real. Who's really stealing our jobs?

Even with a generous estimate of the number of illegal immigrants working in the U.S. at 6 million (notice I said working, not living), this stands in stark contrast to the conservative estimate that nearly 50 million jobs will have been lost to outsourcing by 2015 since NAFTA came into affect in 1994. Well, let's ask ourselves, who's really stealing our jobs? Poor Mexicans? Or Rich White CEOs?

Leaders of the new Liberty Movement feed us ridiculous ideas of the "invading" brown hordes, and the rich whites that make up the upper echelons of organizations like the Minutemen and other similar groups salivate over our reactions. If we're busy fighting the Mexicans at the border, and busy trying to round up all the "illegals" then we're too busy to fight that real enemy, that one that keeps eluding us, the rich and political elite.

Most of us that keep falling for these lines initially might mean well. Heck, we only want to defend our families and our communities... but in reality, we're weakening them even more, by fighting our real potential allies and diverting our attention from the real enemy.

And why are all these brown skinned immigrants coming here in the first place? Why is there this sudden rush in the last thirteen years to get into this country? 80% of all illegal immigrants have entered since 1994. Why is that? What happened in 1994 that affected working people in Mexico just as it affected us? The passage of NAFTA, a free trade program that benefits nobody but the rich people on both sides of the border!

The new Liberty Movement defends the liberty of rich people to own property, while attacking the liberty of movement of brown working class people. The new Liberty Movement doesn't protect liberty, it actively attacks it and defends a system that makes liberty for all people impossible.

We're failing and being used

The new Liberty Movement is not a failure. It's highly successful for accomplishing what the leaders of this movement want. If our interests as white working class people mirror those of other working people, the interests of the rich and political elite within our own movement mirror those of the rich and political elite within the government. The leaders of our own movement seek to keep the infighting amongst working people of all backgrounds and colors alive. Again, if we're too busy fighting each other, then we can't fight them.

We as white working class people are being used at these mobilizations. We're fulfilling our old role of being foot soldiers for the political elite, for keeping other poor and working people in line. We've blinded ourselves again.

How else can we explain the willingness of hundreds of people without healthcare to actively work against legislation that would provide them with that healthcare?

And the worst part is, we don't really gain anything from this situation. We're failing ourselves. All of our work within the New Liberty movement, all of our energy, money, and talents are going to reinforce the same predatory economic, political, and social systems that keep us, as white working people, exploited and living in misery as well.

Our allegiances to these leaders, to people like Ron Paul, to people like Alex Jones, our acceptance of their white populist talk, our willingness to attack migrants, to disrupt attempts to provide healthcare to working class people, our willingness to cling to these ideas of the "other" liberty, the protection of property and not of people, are the biggest reasons that we are doomed to continue to live this way. We will continue to live paycheck to paycheck (at least those of us that have jobs) and in constant fear of eviction or foreclosure. We will continue to have to choose between new schoolbooks for our kids or dinner for the whole family. We will continue to see our retirement funds looted, our world destroyed, and our family members being killed in wars. And we will continue to not be able to do anything about it, unless we change our strategy and direction.

Moving forward

If we as white working people envision a world of safe, free, and economically secure communities, then we must act now. We have to start to identify our allegiances to that of our class, and not our race. We must create a revolutionary white identity that can actively work against all forms of domination that ensure that we will never enjoy true liberty.

Migrants and blacks are not our enemies. White rich people are not our friends. We must reverse this paradigm and start to work alongside movements of nonwhite working people against all predatory political, economic, and social systems. This means not just working against the state, but also working against capitalism. The state and capitalism are two faces of the same coin, a coin that must be thrown away.

We also must work actively against white supremacy in all its incarnations. Our future depends on this. If we as white working people want to enjoy freedom, then we must not be used by the rich to deny it to others and ourselves. The more we act as footsoldiers for the rich, the more we ensure that our freedom is also unattainable.

Historically, we as white working people have seen our allegiance become an allegiance to whiteness, to being white. We can relate to other white people, no matter how poor or rich. They're white like us, and that's something we can identify with, come to terms with. So of course, our natural enemies become nonwhite peoples.

The only problem with this idea is that we've had it wrong for centuries. We've been kept blind to the true nature of what is afoot here, as to what's really going on. Look around us. Who fills the trailer parks with us? Who works in the factories or fast food restaurants with us? Who is beside us working in the fields, picking produce that we'll never really be able to afford? Is it rich people, especially rich white people? Hell no, it isn't. It's brown people, black people, yellow people. It's people who have different shades of skin than us. They are the people that are in similar situations to us, living paycheck to paycheck, suffering like we do. So why then would we view them as our enemy?

Allegiances, traditionally, are made amongst people who have common interests. In an historical sense, white skinned working people have overwhelmingly believed that our interests are based on skin color. We have to work for the betterment of the race, for our culture, for our identity. The truth, however, could never be further away. Whose interests do these beliefs really serve? White workers? In some sense, the answer may be "yes". Working for the advancement of the white race at the cost of other races does buy us relative privileges and even some luxuries. In the end, however, we're still poor, we're still being used to make other people money. And those people aren't non-white working people.

We have a stake in creating a new social paradigm and movement that goes beyond the idea of liberty being a protection for property ownership. We have a direct interest in fighting white supremacy, the state, and capitalism. Our freedom is intimately woven into the freedom of all working people. Until we are free as a working class, we will never be free as individuals, no matter what skin color we are.

I don't want to end on an abstract note. I want to end with a couple concrete steps that white working class people can take to work to build a movement for real liberty.

1. Actively work against groups like the Minutemen, the Klan, the Christian Identity Movement, and others that seek to divide us as working class people from other working class people based on their race, gender, sexuality, nationality or religion. These people are class traitors and ensure that we will never see freedom for ourselves or our families, as they keep us fighting other working class people and not the real enemy: the rich. Disrupt their attempts to organize and to recruit. Make it known they are not welcome at gun shows or other events where you are present. Not joining their organizations isn't enough, we must actively stop them from organizing at all.
2. Actively work against leaders of the New Liberty movement that organize against non-white working class people. Alex Jones, Ron Paul, David Duke, and others are trying to ensure that we will turn on migrants and other people of color rather than turn on rich people, most of whom happen to be white.
3. Organize debtor's unions and tenants unions in your neighborhood. We must come together with our neighbors to defend each other from foreclosures and evictions. Create networks of people in your neighborhood that can show up and help defend each other and prevent evictions.

4. Refuse to pay any debts you have and organize rent strikes. Don't pay your hospital bills, your credit card bills, or any other debts you have. Don't give these people that have been exploiting us any more of your money.
5. Support GI resistance to war and occupation. Many working class people are refusing orders to deploy, and resisting the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan in other ways. Lend them your support at couragetoresist.org
6. Don't join the military, help prevent your family members from joining the military. This institution has robbed too many working people of their lives by convincing them it's their patriotic duty. We must stop falling for this line, and fight for our class, not for the political elites.
7. Follow the examples of other working class people and occupy your workplace if threatened with layoffs or terminations. There have been occupations of workplaces in the U.S. and across other countries as the economic crisis has broadened. These reclamations of workplaces have ended with workers receiving back and severance pay, and sometimes even preventing their workplaces from closing
8. Organize with your neighbors to grow food for your communities. Don't rely on the economic elites for your food any longer. Starting a personal garden is a good first step, but community gardens can provide more food for more people, and create important community ties and working relationships.
9. Be ready to actively defend your neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities from the police and state forces. Take whatever measures you deem necessary to do so.
10. Don't get a job as a cop or prison guard. These jobs also reinforce racial divisions within our class, as well as create domestic armies to use against us when we do work toward our own power. Cops are not our friends. The police systemically exist to protect the rich and their property. Prison guards are not any better. Especially with the expansion of the war on drugs to include a war against Meth, many white working class people are finding themselves in prison and on the other side of the bars from their neighbors in guard's uniforms.
11. Do anything you can to take back resources from the rich. We'll keep this suggestion intentionally vague. The rich have all the food, all the money, all the wealth, and all the power. Let's take it back. Any way we can.

Comments? Questions? Concerns? Hate mail? Wishes to collaborate?
johnbrown@riseup.net

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