

## 'Tea Partiers' offer no happy ending

by Ted Mitchell

Be careful what you wish for. Alice Losasso, arguing in defense of the Tea Party's platform (Editorial: *No yield from money trees yet*), makes a short-sighted and dubious case for our future. Obviously, we wish for lower taxes. I want lower taxes too. Who wouldn't? It's an easy case to make. But, when lowering taxes reduces crucial services, like public schooling, road construction, fire safety, etc, we need make sure we understand the big picture. Unfortunately, Alice and the Tea Party's platform offer no Wonderland. Let us peer through the looking glass to uncover these falsehoods.

Proponents of the Tea Party's movement would have us return to the days prior to the New Deal, reminiscing about our early years as a country without social programs, like Social Security. According to Ms. Losasso this was a time when our country truly prospered. This glorious era had two million of our school-age children working 50 to 70 hours a week. "By 1820, half the workers in many factories were boys and girls who had not reached their eleventh birthday" (*New York Tribune*). This golden age also kept half of our seniors living in poverty as well (*Kangas*).

Economic prosperity, according to the Tea Party's politics, lies in the hands of just a few. During *their* "Golden Age" the very wealthy's bank accounts skyrocketed. By 1906, the top 1% owned over 60% of all of our wealth (*Online Newshour*). As many of our citizens were put in almshouses and debtor prisons, the Rockefellers and Carnegies flourished. These Tea Party patriots would be proud to know that our disparity continues today as the upper one percent now own close to forty percent of our nation's economic pie, while one in five children remain in poverty (*National Center for Children in Poverty*). All of this in one of the wealthiest nations on earth.

But this is the price we pay for our freedom, the Tea Partiers and Ms. Losasso would argue. People just need to pull themselves up by the bootstraps and put their noses to the grindstone. Economic hardship is the result of the survival of the fittest. Unfortunately for our lovers of tea this is not reality. Contrary to their ideology, people have been working harder and more productively than before, yet their hard work has not reaped what Darwinian logic espouses. For instance, "[f]rom 1973 to 2003, median family income grew at less than one-third the rate of productivity." Had wages kept up with productivity over the past 30 years, "median family income in the U.S. would be about \$20,000 higher today than it is" (*Tasini*). Why is it wrong then for these workers to share in our nation's prosperity?

Ms. Losasso and her fellow Tea Partiers would also have us believe that "we have priced ourselves out of the market." Her line of thinking argues that business and industry have moved abroad because unions have demanded lavish wages and benefits. Manufacturing has left our country in search of foreign sweatshop and child labor. Given that the competing Chinese make on average 57 cents an hour, which is about 3 percent of what American manufacturers make, tighten your belt straps America, because our children will be returning to the factories (*McCormack*). Is this the future we have in store for us? I think not.

In fact, I believe that the majority of Americans are too busy working, raising their children, and getting by in this recession to have time to understand what the Tea Partiers are truly advocating. It's not money trees we need; it is progressive taxation that taxes those that can most afford it. Considering that S&P 500 CEOs last year averaged \$10.5 million, 344 times the pay of typical American workers, I believe these people can afford to pay their fair share like they did during the 40's, 50's and 60's (United for a Fair Economy). Between 1945 and 1960, the gross national product grew by almost 250 percent and per capita income by 35 percent (Coontz). By the mid 1950's, sixty percent of the population fell into the middle class. People bought homes, raised families, and were able to count on social programs like Social Security. All of this happened while the highest income tax bracket was as high as 91%.

It is not money trees that we need, it is a reduction in the military industrial complex we fund with 26.5 cents out of every tax dollar. It is ending the \$2.9 billion dollars a week we spend on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Center for Arms Control & Non-Proliferation). Given our defense budget is 48% of all world military spending and we outspend East Asia, Russia, the Middle East, and all of Europe combined, I believe we can find and do have the money to fund our social programs (Global Issues). It's just that we need to change our priorities.

Don't jump down the rabbit hole America and settle for a life of disparity. Insist instead that America protect all of our workers, educate all of our children, ensure a living wage, provide security to our seniors, and keep the promise of the New Deal alive.

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