

Bread and Circuses by Dan Jacoby

Recently, Rep. Steve Cohen (D-TN) recently compared Republican propaganda on the healthcare debate to that of Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels. In a speech on the House floor during debate over repeal of the main healthcare bill, Cohen said, "They say it's a government takeover of health care, a big lie just like Goebbels. You say it enough, you repeat the lie, you repeat the lie, and eventually, people believe it."

What Rep. Cohen said is absolutely true; the Republicans have done nothing regarding healthcare reform but lie, and lie big. Whether talking about "death panels" as Republicans as highly placed as Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) did¹, or calling the plan "socialized medicine," as Rep. Michele Bachmann did during the same debate in which Cohen made his remarks² – even as her husband personally profits from Minnesota's "socialized medicine" plan³, or claiming that everyone will have to pay a new tax on all home sales, or even claiming that if this plan were fully implemented Rep. Gabrielle Giffords would have been left to die⁴, the Republican lies just keep getting bigger and louder.

But the real comparison isn't to Nazi Germany, it is to the Roman Republic of the late 2nd century B.C.E. During that time, the Roman government conceived a plan to provide free wheat and games for the poor in a push to gain popularity while they engaged in multiple wars abroad and massive corruption at home. The poet Juvenal called this practice "panem et circenses," or "bread and circuses."

The plan worked ... for a while. Ultimately, however, it led to the downfall of the Roman Republic and paved the way for the Caesars.

Today, we have Republicans using the same tactics.

In this case, the "bread" is in the form of massive tax cuts, mostly aimed at the wealthiest among us, with no plan to pay for them. Under new Republican rules in the House of Representatives, all new spending programs must be paid for (except for repealing healthcare insurance reform), but tax cuts can be made without regard to the cost.

The "circuses" are on the right-wing blogosphere, all over Fox television and conservative radio, and even on the floor of the House of Representatives. Lies upon lies are heaped on President Obama and the Democrats, paid for by dark entities like the Koch brothers and supported by the five right-wing extremists on the Supreme Court, most publicly by Justices (if that is the word) Scalia and Thomas.⁵

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiHjcPXqDhA>

² <http://www.mediaite.com/tv/rep-michele-bachmann-obamacare-is-the-crown-jewel-of-socialism>

³ <http://minnesotaindependent.com/57982/michele-bachmann-profits-from-socialized-medicine>

⁴ <http://oped.com/2011/01/18/luckily-for-giffords-obamacare-isn't-yet-in-force>

⁵ http://www.seeingtheforest.com/archives/2011/01/common_cause_go.htm

The ultimate circus was the administration of George W. Bush. Bush and his cohort lied about Iraq, torture, deficits, civil rights, the Constitution, wiretaps, national security – basically, everything. Following the overwhelming defeats in the 2006 and 2008 elections, one might think that Republicans would decide that lying ultimately leads to failure, but instead they merely ramped up the lies. Starting even before President Obama's inauguration, they lied about his birth, nationality and religion. Since then, they have done nothing but lie about healthcare, taxes, the cause of the deficit – and even John Boehner, on the verge of becoming the next Speaker of the House, refused to refute the continuing lie about President Obama's heritage and nationality.⁶

Why is this a circus? Because the media has long since abandoned its role as the fourth estate. Self-described "journalists" no longer search for the truth; instead, they merely parrot both sides' press releases and call it "fair reporting." Worse, they broadcast sensationalism without comment in their relentless pursuit of the obscene, believing (perhaps correctly) that it is the best, or at least easiest, path to greatest short-term profits. The result is that right-wingers and their puppets, from Sarah Palin to Michele Bachmann to John Boehner, can lie about anything and get away with it.

It took less than a century from the start of "bread and circuses" to the complete downfall of the Roman Republic. In this mass media age, it will take far less time to destroy this republic, unless we fight back now.

We can begin by demanding that our mass media report the truth, and report the facts every time some right-wing nut tells another whopper – in other words, they have to call out the lies and the liars, and they have to do it in no uncertain terms. We must also begin to flood the right-wing blogosphere, pushing back against the lies that are spread across that weird area of the internet.

Decisions are made by those who show up. If progressives don't show up en masse, and begin demanding the right to make the decisions that guide the future of this country, this country will have a bleak future. We will even run out of bread and circuses.

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⁶ http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40953865/ns/politics-capitol_hill