

Tea Party Mortally Wounded; Prospects for the “Empire Strikes Back”

By [Jeffrey Sommers](#)

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The Tea Party is now clearly a distinctly minority faction. Its prospects for obtaining future majority rule are small. The most radical (Todd Aiken) and shallow (Scott Brown) Senators lost. Reformers like Elizabeth Warren and Tammy Baldwin won. We now have powerful voices for progressive reform that can join figures like Bernie Sanders in pursuit of curbing the “finance gone wild” that has put our economy in the doldrums for the past four years. To be clear, these same Senators will have to also take on their own President to achieve these reforms.

Tea Party figures, such as Wisconsin’s Governor Scott Walker, are far stronger as *communicators* than representing popular *ideas*. Politicians like Walker deploy those skills to *conceal* their agenda, not to directly promote their ideas among the general electorate. The same goes for one of the most radical Tea Party Senators, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin. While happy to share his radical-right agenda with party insiders, Johnson takes great care to present himself as a moderate with the general electorate. Were this NOT the case, Barack Obama and Wisconsin Democratic Senator elect Tammy Baldwin would have lost in Wisconsin. They didn’t. In short, the T-Party is a paper tiger that will now only win races with candidates that can successfully pass themselves off as moderates.

Next takeaway: Paul Ryan was a disastrous Vice President choice for Mitt Romney. While Ryan was useful for ginning up support for Romney among the GOP base, he proved a liability in the general election. Ryan is unpopular and his national political aspirations are finished. Ryan successfully presented himself as a moderate in his congressional district. Nationally, however, his budget and radical Ayn Rand ideas proved too much political baggage to portage across the American political landscape increasingly fatigued by T-Party fanatics.

Next: The 24/7 Fox and toxic shock talk radio machine provided a strong minority base, but the steady diet of hate and lies turned even more people off than it turned on. Hate media has reached a point of diminishing returns. It will likely ratchet up the hate rhetoric to create an even more aggressive American *freikorps*. This could further reduce their general popularity in conditions of stability. Alternatively, under greater crisis conditions, this could present a dangerous force in times of more profound turbulence and an opportunity for the “Empire Strikes Back.”

Next: The GOP’s attempt at being clever and bullying with voter suppression backfired. It only angered people, making them turnout in larger numbers. Moreover, the biggest irony was the GOP’s attempt to buy elections with the unlimited money Citizens United ruling. In effect, this also backfired, delivering an unattractive candidate (Romney) selected by big money. In effect, the GOP’s near Dr. Strangelovian uncontrollable urge to manipulate and

control through using devious McCarthy/Nixonian tactics turned out to be an exploding cigar in their own faces. In near Yosemite Sam fashion they shot they continually shoot themselves in the foot. While funny in it's own way, it could prove deadly serious under more serious crisis conditions with a more fragile, fractured social order.

Next: African-American, Latino, and to a lesser extent single women, LGBT, and youth voters saved all of us against the pox of Koch/T-Party rule. Again, this was facilitated by the GOP's war on these groups. Look for future attempts by the GOP divide and conquer them. This already succeeded to some extent with women voters. In short, we cannot rely on changing demographics to ensure continued decline of the GOP.

The GOP's remaining political strength is in deflecting people's frustrations off capital's war on working people and onto government. The GOP has successfully employed this tactic since the infamous 1978 Proposition 13 anti-property tax measure in California. This has been made manifest by government's visibility. The private economy consists of businesses that create distinct brands. Thus, even though big business has only a few structurally monolithic blocs, these go unnoticed by an electorate that "sees" a collection of tens of thousands of discrete entities. Politically, this is the structural advantage that business has over government. Businesses are seen as individuals, whereas government is perceived in the *singular* as an easily identified target branded as "the problem." Although government has untold thousands of individual units it is seen as one entity, and thus it is easy to organize people against it. This phenomenon was observable in the Soviet bloc where it was easy to rally people against government, but very difficult to get them to organize against the even worse oligarchs that formed private sector companies after the Soviet bloc collapsed.

Moreover, for the largely de-unionized America (only 11% unionized) the only way to halt shrinking take-home pay is to cut taxes, rather than bargain for higher wages. This move against taxation, in effect, in effect, starves the country of needed infrastructure that generates growth and higher wages in the long term. Furthermore, as economist Michael Hudson notes, the war against property taxes (instead of a fight against declining wages) merely frees up income for higher-property values that banks capture through larger making bigger mortgages. Instead of using our income to build better schools, roads, and parks, we are using an every larger share of income to support banks. In short, under the GOP (and with much Democratic support), we are returning to a neo-serfdom in which we pay rents in return for no value added. Except, now the rents go to banks instead of manor owners.

Barack Obama has been anything but progressive. He seems a decent man (by the standards of Presidents), but immediately upon taking office his first term he replaced his progressive economic team with Clinton's Robert Rubin crew, who were every bit as culpable as the GOP in bringing about the 2008 financial collapse. Moreover, Obama, whether through conceit or a psychological need to be a national healer, rarely took on the GOP. Thus, we lost our chance to get single payer health or a public option. These were both possible in the chaos and GOP demoralization over their 2008 election loss. However, Obama gave the GOP time to organize against these measures and thus could only get a version of Romney/Heritage/Gingrich/Dole healthcare passed.

The great Danger

President Obama's national healer complex and endless surrender to the right and might result in implementing an even more severe austerity regime. Only Nixon could go to China and only a Democrat could unravel Medicare & Social Security. Obama has already signaled that he is willing to make cuts to both Medicare and Social Security, rather than pursue options such as raising the income cap to fund Social Security. To prevent this, the very people who worked so hard to canvass and elect Obama will now have to pirouette and organize against him. Will they? I doubt it.

Foreign Policy

Romney intended to reprise the Reagan years with economic "recovery" through ginning up the military industrial complex. He surrounded himself with the worst chicken hawks, such as John Bolton, who were gunning for "preventive wars." This would have been disastrous for the US and the world. President Obama needs to be challenged on any scores, from too frequent use of drone strikes, to continued operation of Gitmo. Nonetheless, we have likely averted war by keeping the GOP out of the White House.

On the Recovery

There are signals of a slow recovery underway, as seen with the October jobs report. As more people work, more demand is created in the economy, leading to more jobs. This in turn leads to more tax revenues, which in turn reduces deficits, and pressures for cuts to social expenditures. As the US disengages (hopefully) from foreign wars, more money becomes available to rebuild our dilapidated infrastructure. This, in turn leads to further demand in the economy, creating more employment. This, in turn, can create a self-catalyzing cycle of greater employment and more tax revenues still. This will be further strengthened by the trend of American energy production (both dirty and green, hopefully more of the latter). This, in turn, reduces imports, thus improving the US national trade balance. It also creates more jobs and more tax revenues yet. This is a best-case scenario and could easily be derailed by external shocks (e.g., foreign wars), or GOP obstructionism. Regardless, the US will need to purge the parasite (rent-seeking, extractive finance) from its body and instead feed itself a steady diet of investment. This might all work in the short to medium terms, but is given natural resource and environmental constraints, requires a serious national and global dialogue on how to transition to a manageable, sustainable global economy and society.

In sum, a short-term victory, but with bigger challenges ahead...

***Jeffrey Sommers** is an Associate Professor of Political Economy & Public Policy in Africology and Global Studies fellow at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee (his perspectives are not linked to his university affiliation). In addition to CounterPunch he has published in the Financial Times, The Guardian, and other text media. He also appears regularly on RT and other television and radio. He can be contacted at Jeffrey.sommers@fulbrightmail.org.*

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