

America drinks coffee, not Tea

I recently attended a local school district financial meeting to support and vote on the school committee's proposed budget. The event was packed, requiring alternate viewing rooms. I wrongly assumed that the large numbers that were there were parents supporting their child's education. Instead, the crowd included many seniors that were inspired by local Tea Partiers to vote down the budget, thereby avoiding tax increases. The anti-tax movement was successful in the end and school programs will be cut. I was shocked.

GUEST COLUMN

According to a New York Times poll, people who support the Tea Party are mostly male and are over 45 years of age. I couldn't help but think about the hypocrisy of the moment. A group of seniors (or soon to be seniors) that count on Social Security, Medicare, frozen property tax rates, and are likely graduates of a previous tax paid public education voted down the schooling for today's youth. "No taxes at all costs! Well, except for what is good for me, myself, and I," exclaim the Tea Party supporters.

The Tea Party should be renamed the Me, Myself, and I Party. For instance, it is okay for taxpayers to allocate over \$700 billion for Social Security each year, but it's not okay to increase the \$528 billion (local, state, and federal) to educate children. It's also okay to spend \$468 billion on Medicare, in addition to forgoing the lost revenue due to frozen property tax rates for those town residents over 65 years of age. Meaning, they've had their day in the sun — public schooling, new public highways, the GI Bill, and lower taxes on the poor and middle class — because the wealthy were paying higher taxes back then since they could (and can now) afford it. What was good for them was only meant for them — the new slogan for the Me, Myself, and I Party.

Cutting taxes and wasteful government spending is the main tenet of the Tea Party, yet amazingly there is no call to cut defense spending (almost \$700 billion), a huge portion of our tax bill. Consider that we have spent over a trillion dollars for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. That's over \$12 billion each month now in taxes and borrowed money. Imagine what we could do to offset the cost for public schooling with this money? But, that's not important given the Partiers are not likely to have kids in school anymore. Me, myself, and I again.

Back when the Tea Partiers were growing up our country had a middle class that made a living wage. They had jobs that could support a family and a chance to live the American dream. But since then we've seen our country let good paying manufacturing jobs leave for other countries. We've seen real wages stagnate since the 1970's, all while the very wealthy got wealthier. We've not seen a disparity of income and wealth this egregious since the Gilded Age. For instance, the top 10 percent holds over 70 percent of our nation's wealth, whereas the bottom 50 percent owns only 2.5 percent. They also own over 90 percent of all stocks, bonds, and mutual funds! The American dream still exists, but only for a few.

Why can't those that profit and benefit the most from our nation's and people's successes pay a fair share? Ironically, the Tea Partiers reminisce about the good ol' times of their conservative icon, Ronald Reagan. More than likely though, they don't know that the top tax rate was 50% during his reign. Moreover, during the Nixon's presidency the wealthiest paid up to 70% and during Eisenhower's time in the Whitehouse the top rate reached 91%! These were Republicans, espousing the free market, baseball, and apple pie. The difference between now and then was that Americans demanded a share in the prosperity of their country. It was not communism or socialism. It was just fair.

So, when you hear a local Tea Partier screaming on a corner or in a town meeting about cutting taxes, remind them if they want to take back their country, they need to curb defense spending and call for an end to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Remind them that real Americans want Social Security, healthcare for every citizen, and tax-funded education for all kids. We can have all that, but we really need to tax those that can most afford it. And, most importantly, remind them that Americans don't drink tea, they drink coffee. Wake up, fellow patriots and have a cup, of coffee, that is.

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