



## Voting to give more money to millionaires

Maryland's Question 7 presents opportunity to show them the love

Dan Rodricks - 10/21/2012

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As I drove by the old Playhouse cinema on 25th Street in Baltimore the other day, I thought of the hapless fellow I encountered on the screen there in the 1970s — Nino, the lead character in "Bread and Chocolate," a comedy about a poor Italian waiter who tries to make a living among the affluent of Switzerland.

At one point in his degrading odyssey, Nino agrees to give his hard-earned savings to an industrialist, who promises to invest it for him. Alas, the businessman turns out to be engaged in a stock swindle, and, facing prison, he commits suicide. That leaves Nino penniless again, and he has no choice but to return to [Italy](#).

"What do I tell my family?" he wonders. "That I gave my money to a millionaire?"

That sort of thing — Ninoism, giving money to millionaires — happens a lot, especially in the United States. In fact, Marylanders have a couple of opportunities to give money to millionaires on Election Day — by voting for [Mitt Romney](#) and by voting for Question 7.

Regarding the latter — a measure that would expand legalized gambling by adding a sixth casino in [Prince George's County](#) and live table games at all casinos in the state — I'd like to point out something that might not be readily apparent to my fellow Marylanders when they read the ballot question in the voting booth:

If Question 7 is approved, it will make life even lovelier for the millionaires who own casinos here. In working out a complex deal at a special summer session of

the General Assembly, our legislators did casino owners a great favor by allowing their tax rates to be cut by as much as 18 percentage points below what we agreed to take from them when we legalized slots in 2008. Instead of paying the state 67 percent of the total proceeds, they'll pay much less, and their tax rates could drop even more down the road.

So, nice deal our politicians made.

Of course, there are all sorts of examples of Ninoism. Corporate tax breaks, income tax loopholes, a low capital gains tax rate. Wealth concentration and income disparity have reached their highest levels since the Great Depression. If there was a class war, it ended long ago and the winners were the people at the top.

Which is why I don't understand the whining of the One Percent

Last week, two writers commiserated on forbes.com — one under the headline, "The Unctuous, Impoverishing Bigotry Of Class Warfare," the other under: "Class Warfare: The Mortal Enemy Of Economic Growth And Jobs."

The latter, by a [Cato](#) Institute fellow, blasted [President Obama](#) for suggesting that the rich pay more in income taxes in the coming years. "Obama's priority is class warfare," wrote the Cato fellow. "That's why he relentlessly denounces job creators as 'millionaires and billionaires.' That's why he demands that they be punished with higher tax rates."

The other piece, by the CEO of a "free market think tank" based in Chicago, was downright precious, the writer admonishing us to be nice to the rich because, after all, they made their millions "by serving others well."

Oy vey.

"This bigotry against those who succeed must stop," the writer demanded. "We must all champion the entrepreneurs and those who work with them. We must champion them in the basement; we must champion them when they are rising. ... And most of all, we must champion them when they make it to the penthouse and become part of the 1 percent."

Downright Churchillian, isn't it?

Defenders of the economic elite like to throw the red flag and call out class warfare whenever someone, starting with the president of the United States, talks about the relatively low rate of taxes the wealthiest Americans pay

What exactly has Obama said about this? That Congress should extend the Bush-era tax cuts for people earning less than \$250,000 annually, and that people earning above that amount should pay more.

Obama: "To give me another tax break, or to give [Warren Buffett](#) another tax break, or to give Mitt Romney another tax break, that would cost about a trillion dollars and we can't afford it, not at a time when we're trying to bring down our deficit, not at a time when we're trying to reduce our debt."

Very reasonable, and yet the wealthy will whine that we're picking on them. They absolutely hate to be called out on this — that is, to have the public reminded of the great income disparity that has developed over the last 30 years, or how the middle class has been in decline, or how wages have been virtually flat as wealth became more concentrated in the top 5 percent of American families.

It's not jealousy that drives this conversation. It's not bigotry. It's not classism. It's not socialism. It's just an in-the-bones-outrage about the rich asking for even more tax breaks, and politicians — Mitt Romney and [Paul Ryan](#), dozens of [Republicans](#) running for Congress, and a [Maryland General Assembly](#) and power structure dominated by [Democrats](#) — eager to accommodate them again.