



August 24, 2010

Gloomy Progressive's Prescription for Eliminating the Middle Class

By [Chuck Rogér](#)

Former Clinton Labor Secretary Robert Reich is a progressive. On the Huffington Post, Reich -- now a U.C. Berkeley public policy professor -- [proclaims](#) that America's middle class has been in "decline." The professor writes that since the 1980s, "the economy has made the rich far richer without doing squat for the vast middle."

Suggesting that the middle class has suffered over the last thirty years requires blindness to reality. Cato Institute's Will Wilkinson [describes](#) how progressives get hung up on "economic inequality" and make "a tangle of conceptual errors and a mix of questionable moral assumptions." Pointing out that purchasing power best measures prosperity, Wilkinson shows that even America's poor have enjoyed increased consumption during Reich's imaginary middle class decline.

Reich's language -- "the *economy* has made the rich far richer" [emphasis added] -- is revealing. Dogmatists do tend to invoke mysterious constructs. As a species, progressives sport a style of reasoning which we can picture primitive humans having used millennia ago. Accusing the "economy" of enriching people is like Thag explaining to the clan that dinner will be fabulous tonight because the fire god took extra care with the mammoth meat.

Mysterious constructs are not needed for one to understand that wealth is earned mostly through hard work. On the flip-side, ideologues like Reich have difficulty accepting that most poor people are poor not as a result of trying and failing, but from surrendering to "help" that encourages failure. Progressives reject such truths and instead defer to dreamy possibilities. Fanciful what-ifs are essential to the narrative. Can't be pessimistic *all* the time.

Yet drawing on a bleak worldview that sees wealth as a scarce resource to be allotted throughout the collective, Reich declares that "the rich have been getting a larger and larger portion of total income." The language betrays a mentality incapable of noticing prosperity growth across the economic spectrum.

At one point in Reich's sermon, the professor appears to recognize the corrupt manner in which America's ruling class has been funneling wealth to already wealthy people. The factors include

... the systematic and ever cleverer manipulation of laws and rules by those able to pay lobbyists, legislators, lawyers, accountants to do their bidding. As income and wealth have risen to the top, so has the power to manipulate the system in order to acquire even more money and more influence.

Correct on every count. Logical next steps would be to dissect and address ruling class manipulation. But not with Reich. Instead of entering solution space, the professor wanders into a misuse of the oppressor-versus-oppressed construct.

To be sure, globalization and technological change have bestowed gains disproportionately on those with the education and connections to benefit most from them while burdening Americans without the education and connections most needed.

Income is not earned, but "bestowed." Ominous "change" does the bestowing. Change also does some "burdening." Reich's inference that educated, connected Americans are oppressing ignorant, unconnected people succeeds only in pointing out that failing to get an education "burdens" people who fail to get an education. As for uneducated Americans having no "connections," the professor is dead wrong. The uneducated poor are kept handy for votes -- under the thumbs of Reich-minded politicians.

But intellectuals like Reich see no value in time spent examining incriminating connections. So many pontifications to be issued. So little time. Reich claims,

... instead of enlarging the circle of prosperity so that the vast middle class could come out winners as well- instead of strengthening trade unions, improving public education, deepening public investments, enlarging safety nets, and making the tax system more progressive-the nation took direction from those at the top, and did the opposite.

A more destructive prescription for what ails America would be tough to imagine. With the assertion that "the nation" failed to enlarge "the circle of prosperity," Reich again overlooks long-term improvement in quality of life across all economic strata. Let's break down the formula for making "winners" of the middle class.

- 1) Unions have become taxpayer enemies who use government to redistribute taxpayer wealth to union pension plans. Reich wants to "strengthen" unions -- which, to progressives, means redistributing more wealth.
- 2) Overinflated education spending hasn't budged student performance. Reich wants to "[improve] public education" -- more debt, more taxes.
- 3) Economic stimulus, U.K.-style government health care, and unsustainable Social Security and Medicare threaten to bankrupt America. Reich wants "deepening public investments" -- more stimulus, entitlements, debt, and taxes.
- 4) If politicians ever gather the courage to eliminate bailouts and reduce handouts, we'll see Greek-style violence as overcompensated union pensioners and the career unemployed take to the streets. Reich's suggestion? More "safety nets," requiring more debt and more taxes.
- 5) Reich wants to confiscate larger percentages of income from top earners who create jobs that would employ the unemployed if politicians with Reich's mentality would go away.

But Reich-minded politicians will not go away.

The professor's prescription for stopping a nonexistent middle class decline would drive the middle class into permanent decline. The remedies would turbo-charge the destructive agenda of Barack Obama and a Democrat Party that has been eaten by progressives. America would grow more economically stratified. Skyrocketing numbers of poor would become "connected" to government helpers. The rich would consist of the helpers and the helpers' corporate and organized labor parasites. The middle class would fade to memory.

In order to reestablish middle-class freedom and prosperity, we must stop the progressives. In order to wean the poor from government help that discourages any effort to join the middle class, we must stop the progressives.

Let us resolve to keep tight reigns on representatives whom we elect in November to replace the current herd of tyrants. And finally, because hunger for power will never disappear from human nature's dark side, let us not believe for one microsecond that substituting elephants for donkeys will make the herd behave better than the way in which our arrogant rulers have grown accustomed to behaving.

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