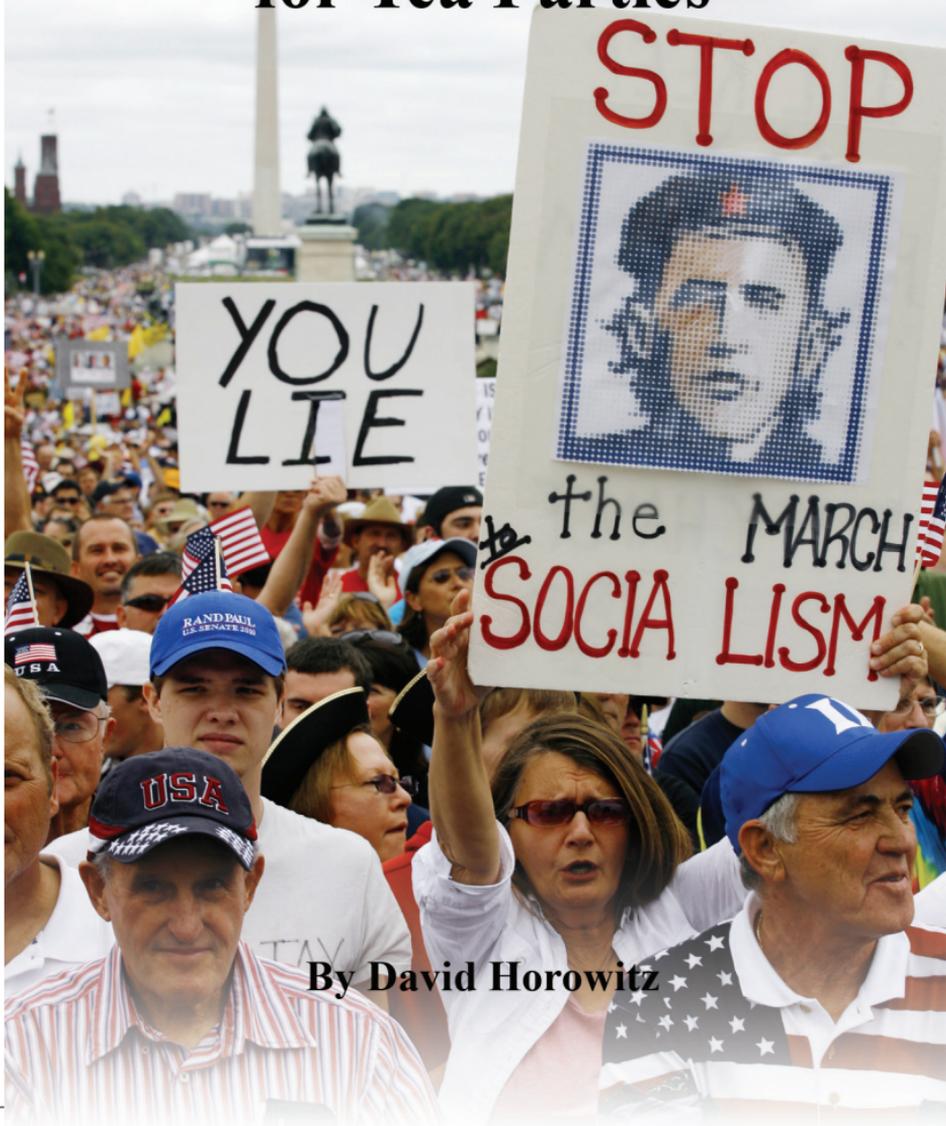


The Art of Political War for Tea Parties



By David Horowitz

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A specter is haunting America – the specter of a people rising. From one coast to the other and across the great plains, Americans are waking up to the threat from a leftist elite that is determined to fundamentally change the American system, push through a socialist agenda, and make every citizen dependent on the state. The Obama machine has already spent trillions of tax-payer dollars to finance a takeover of the American workplace and to stifle the independence of the American people. But America is a resilient nation, bred on the frontiers of individualism and enterprise, and built on the principles of private property and individual freedom; and the resistance to their socialist plans has already begun.

In May 2009, just five months into the Obama administration, the people of California launched a tax

revolt in the biggest spending state in the nation. So reckless were the leftist Democrats who run California (and have done so for more than half a century) that its deficit alone was larger than the budgets of most other states in the Union and of many of the nations of the world. Leftwing politicians don't cut budgets; they propose new taxes. And California's leftwing legislature did just that. But thanks to a constitutional amendment put in place by the California electorate through the state Initiative process, California legislators can't raise taxes without a two-thirds referendum of the people. So they were forced to hold a special election in May to appeal to the electorate to pass five new ballot Initiatives to raise taxes.

But when the votes were counted, all five tax-raising Initiatives had been defeated by 60% margins. Even in San Francisco. A sixth Initiative designed by tax opponents to punish legislators who do not balance the budget passed by a more than 70% margin. Even in San Francisco. If one of the most liberal states in the Union is saying no to the soak-the-public philosophy of leftwing legislators, Obama socialism is in big trouble.

The revolt in California quickly spread to the entire nation through the efforts of the Tea Parties movement, the most innovative, exciting and powerful grassroots force in the history of American conservatism. It is vital to the health of this country that the Tea Parties movement grows. More to the point: it is essential to American

survival that the Tea Parties movement succeeds. On the eve of the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama said “We are five days away from fundamentally transforming America.” The Tea Parties movement is the American people saying no to Obama’s plans for revolution.

* * *

A movement without an effective strategy for defeating its opponents cannot win in the political arena. Therefore it is important to reacquaint ourselves with the art of political war.

While Democrats are morally bankrupt and are bereft of plans that will actually work, they still win elections because they understand a simple fact: politics in America is driven by the romance of the underdog, the story of the little guy who goes up against the system and triumphs in the end. It is a story about opportunity and fairness. To win the hearts and minds of the American voter, you have to tap the emotions of this romance. Whoever does that has a winning edge.

America’s heroes are all cut to a common mold. Whether it is George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Davy Crockett, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Amelia Earhart, Jackie Robinson, Ronald Reagan or Colin Powell, the theme is always the same: The common man who rises against the odds. America’s political romance is “Mr. Smith Goes To Washington” to make things right.

It is “Meet John Doe” who speaks for the voiceless. It is Luke Skywalker who saves the planet by using the good side of the Force to defeat the Empire. It is the odyssey of individuals who challenge power, overcome adversity and rise to the top. Everyone in America thinks of themselves as an underdog and aspires to be a hero.

The cause of the underdog wins American hearts because it resonates with our deepest religious and moral convictions of doing good and helping others. And because it is America’s own story. We began as a small nation, standing up to the world’s most powerful empire. We dedicated ourselves to the idea that all men are created equal. We are a nation of immigrants and a generous people who arrived with nothing and made fortunes in a new world. This is the American Dream.

It’s a story that will get you every time. But at election time, it is the political left and the Democratic Party who know how to wield it and turn it into a weapon; and Republicans and conservatives generally who don’t. The Tea Parties have changed all that. And that is another sign that we are in an extraordinary political moment. The Tea Parties draw on the heritage of America’s own revolution as an underdog nation and are the voice of the people, oppressed now by their own government which is out of control and determined to crush them.

* * *

In positioning themselves as champions of the under-represented, neglected and oppressed, leftists employ a version of America's story that they have manufactured through their grip on the media and the university culture. They have transformed America's story from an epic of freedom into a tale of racism, exploitation and domination. In their telling, American history is no longer a narrative of expanding opportunity, of men and women succeeding against the odds. Instead, it is a Marxist morality play about a wealthy white patriarchy and its victims.

In staging their political dramas, progressives invariably claim to speak in the name of America's alleged "oppressed." Every policy of the Democratic Party is presented as a program to help the victims of American oppression—women, children, minorities and the poor. Republican policies are portrayed by Democrats as programs to serve the powerful and injure the weak, that will ignore the voiceless and vulnerable, and keep the victims down.

Republicans play right into the Democrats' trap because they approach politics as a management problem and never mention the people whom Democratic policies might "oppress." To Republicans, every issue is a policy issue, how government can be better administered. It is about the utility of a tax cut, the efficiency of a program, the optimal method for running the government enterprise. Republicans talk like businessmen who want a chance to manage the country so that it will turn a profit.

There is nothing wrong with instituting good policies and running things efficiently or turning a profit. But while Republicans are promoting these policies and giving themselves gold stars for doing so, Democrats are engaged in a different kind of drama. They are busy attacking Republicans as servants of the rich, oppressors of the weak and defenders of the strong. As enemies of “the people.”

Listen to former New York governor and Mario Cuomo describing Republicans to the Democrats’ 1996 National Convention:

We need to work as we have never done before between now and November 5th to take the Congress back from Newt Gingrich and the Republicans, because ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, the Republicans are the real threat. They are the real threat to our women. They are the real threat to our children. They are the real threat to clean water, clean air and the rich landscape of America.

This is the Democrats’ language of political war. Democrats connect emotionally with people’s fears and concerns. The appeal to help the underdog and defend the victim resonates with all Americans. This is because Americans are a fair-minded people. Most successful Americans came from humble origins themselves. They want to help others. They want everyone to have the chance to succeed.

So do Republicans and conservatives. But they rarely connect their policies and principles to this political romance. Or to people – the people whom the Democrats’ policies hurt and conservative policies might help.

There’s a good reason for this. Conservatives are busy defending America against the left’s attacks and the anti-American caricature they have constructed. Conservatives know that America is still a land of opportunity and freedom, and that nobody in America is really “oppressed.” (Otherwise, why would poor, black, Hispanic and Asian minorities be desperately seeking to come here? To be oppressed?!!! If they feel oppressed, why aren’t they leaving instead?)

But politics isn’t just about reality. If it were, good principles and good policies would win every time. It’s about images and symbols, and the emotions they evoke. This is the battle that conservatives generally lose.

In the romance of the victim, as progressives stage it, Republicans and conservatives are always on the side of the bad guys—the powerful, the male, the white and the wealthy. It’s easy to see how patriotism plays into this trap. Defending America is readily mis-represented as an attitude that says: “I’m all right Jack, so you should be too.” The left relishes the opportunity to smear patriots as members of the selfish party instead of as defenders of everybody’s freedom.

Ann Coulter has described the motto of the left as this: “Speak loudly and carry a small victim.” For the Democrats, victims – real and alleged – are their human shields to protect them in battle. The romance of the victim stirs the souls of their supporters and energizes their base. Equally important, it provides the nuclear warheads of their political attack. Conservatives are targeted victimizers and oppressors. Leftists present themselves as the champions of the oppressed. Learning how to turn this around will turn around the political war as well.

Going On The Attack

Fortunately, conservatives can use the leftwing attack plan against them. Contrary to the left’s view, America is not a land of victims. It is a highly mobile society, with a citizenry that aspires upwards through the system, not against it.

Conservatives can also turn the left’s oppression myth around, and aim its guns at them. In fact, using the romance of the underdog against the left is the best way to neutralize their attack.

The way to do it is to recognize that the most powerful forces obstructing opportunity for poor and minority Americans, the most powerful forces oppressing them, are progressives, the Democratic Party, and their political creation—the welfare state.

Progressives engineered a welfare system that destroyed the inner city black family and created a vast “under-class” so mired in the culture of dependency and poverty that they may never escape. Progressives destroyed the bottom rungs of the ladder of economic success by corrupting a public school system in which half the students never graduate and half of those who do are functionally illiterate. Every major inner city in America – Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Harlem, South Central Los Angeles – every school board and school district, every city council in those inner cities is 100% controlled by the Democratic and progressives, and has been for 100 years. Everything that is wrong with the inner cities of America that policy can affect Democrats and progressives are responsible for. They have their boot heels on the necks of poor black and Hispanic children all across America and are crushing them every day. And yet Republicans and conservatives are too polite to mention this.

Conservatives already oppose the programs of the left as obstacles to the production of wealth and barriers to opportunity for all Americans. But they don’t connect these programs to the real people they will affect. If they did, the left would be exposed as the oppressors of the very people they claim to help, and the political war would be turned upside down.

The Principles

Here are the principles of political war that the left understands but conservatives do not:

1. Politics is war conducted by other means
2. Politics is a war of position
3. In political wars the aggressor usually prevails
4. Position is defined by fear and hope
5. The weapons of politics are symbols evoking fear and hope
6. Victory lies on the side of the people

Here are the principles explained:

Politics is war conducted by other means.

Conservatives often refuse to recognize this but their opponents have made it a reality. Democrats and leftists conduct their political campaigns as a form of warfare, and it is suicidal for their opponents to ignore this fact,

In political warfare you do not fight just to prevail in an argument, but to destroy the enemy's fighting ability. Conservatives often seem to regard political combats as they would a debate before the Oxford Political Union, as though winning depends on rational arguments and carefully articulated principles. But the audience of politics is not made up of Oxford dons, and different rules prevail.

For starters, in the modern media environment you normally have only 30 seconds to make your point. Even if you had time to develop an argument, the audience you need to reach (the undecided and those in the middle who are not paying much attention) wouldn't get it. Your words would go over some of their heads and the rest would not even hear them, or they would be quickly forgotten amidst the bustle and pressure of daily life. Worse, while you've been making your argument the other side has already painted you as a mean-spirited, border-line racist controlled by religious zealots, and securely in the pockets of the white male rich. Nobody who sees you this way is going to listen to you in any case. You're politically dead.

Politics is a war of position.

In war there are two sides: friends and enemies. Your task is to define yourself as the friend of as large a constituency as possible, while defining your opponent as their enemy wherever and whenever you can. Define your cause as the cause of the underdog and your opponents as the victimizers and oppressors.

The act of defining combatants is analogous to the military concept of choosing the terrain of battle. Choose the terrain that makes the fight as stacked in your favor as possible. But be careful. American politics takes place in a pluralistic framework, where constituencies are diverse and often in conflict. "Fairness" and "tolerance" are the formal rules of democratic engagement. If you appear

mean-spirited, nasty, or too judgmental, it will make the task easier for your opponent to define you as a threat, and therefore as “the enemy.”

In political warfare, the aggressor usually prevails.

Conservatives often pursue a strategy of waiting for the other side to attack. In football this is known as a “prevent defense.” In politics it is the strategy of losers.

Aggression is advantageous because politics is a war of position. Position is defined by images that stick. By striking first you can define the issues and your adversary. Defining the opposition is the decisive move in all political war. Other things being equal, whoever is put on the defensive generally winds up on the losing side.

In attacking your opponent, take care to do it right. Going negative increases the risk of being defined as an enemy. Therefore, it can be counter-productive. Ruling out the negative, however, can incur an even greater risk.

Position is defined by fear and hope.

The twin emotions of politics are fear and hope. Those who provide people with hope become their friends; those who inspire fear become enemies. Of the two, hope is the better choice. By offering people hope and yourself as its provider, you show your better side and maximize your potential support.

But fear is a powerful and indispensable weapon. If your opponent is successful in defining you negatively, he will diminish your ability to offer hope. This is why Democrats are so determined to portray conservatives as mean-spirited, and hostile to minorities, the middle class and the poor.

It is important to work away from the negative images your opponent wants to pin on you. If you know you are going to be attacked as intolerant and bigoted it's a good idea to lead with a position that is inclusive and fair-minded. If you are going to be framed as mean-spirited and ungenerous, it's a good idea to put on a smile and lead with symbols that project generosity and charity.

The weapons of politics are symbols evoking fear and hope.

Conservatives lose a lot of political battles because they come across as hard-edged, scolding, scowling and sanctimonious. A good rule of thumb says be just the opposite. You have to convince people you care about them before they'll care about what you have to say.

When you do get to speak, don't forget that a sound-bite is all you have. Whatever you have to say, make sure to say it loud and clear. Keep it simple and keep it short. (A slogan is always better). Repeat it often. Get it on television. Radio is good, but with few exceptions, only television reaches a public that is electorally significant.

In politics, television is reality.

Of course, you have a base of supporters who will listen for hours to what you have to say if that's what you want. In the battles facing you, they will play an important role. Therefore, what you say to them is also important. But it is not going to decide elections. The audiences that will determine your fate are audiences that you will first have to persuade. You will have to find a way to reach them and get them to listen. And get them to support you. With these audiences, you will never have time for real arguments or proper analyses. Images—symbols and sound-bites—will always prevail.

Therefore it is absolutely essential to focus your message and repeat it over and over again. Lack of focus will derail your message. If you make too many points, your message will be diffused and nothing will get through. The result will be the same as if you had made no point at all.

Leftists have a party line. When they are fighting an issue they focus their agenda. During legislative battles, every time a Democrat steps in front of the cameras there is at least one line in his speech that is shared with his colleagues. “Tax breaks for the wealthy at the expense of the poor,” is one example. Repetition insures that the message will get through.

When Republicans speak during legislative battles, they all march to a different drummer. There are many

messages instead of one. One message is a sound-bite. Many messages are an indecipherable noise. The result of many messages is that there is no message.

Symbols and sound-bites determine the vote. These are what hit people in the gut before they have time to think. And these are what people remember. Symbols are the impressions that last, and what ultimately defines you.

Carefully chosen words and phrases are more important than paragraphs, speeches, party platforms and manifestos. What you project through images is what you are.

Victory lies on the side of the people.

This is the bottom line for each of the principles and for all of the principles. You must define yourself in ways that people understand. You must give people hope in your victory, and make them fear the victory of your opponent. You can accomplish both by identifying yourself and your issues with the underdog and the victim, with minorities and the disadvantaged, with the ordinary Janes and Joes.

This is what leftists do best, and conservatives often neglect to do at all. Every political statement by a leftist is an effort to say: “We care about women, children, minorities, working Americans and the poor.” And: “Conservatives are mean-spirited, serve the rich and don’t care about you.” This is the left’s strategy of political war. If conservatives are to win the political war we have to turn these images around.

We also have to make our campaigns a cause. During the Cold War, conservatives had a cause. They were saving the country from Communism. It was a cause that resonated at every level with the American people. The poorest citizen understood that their freedom was at stake in making sure that conservatives were elected to conduct the nation's defense. We are fighting a battle today that is very much a continuation of the Cold War, a battle against the totalitarian left at home and abroad. Rally Americans to the defense of their country.

In a democracy, finally, the cause that fires up passions is the cause of the people. That is why politicians like to run "against Washington" and against anything that represents the "powers that be." The ideas of justice and freedom are powerful motivators. They will energize the troops and fuel the campaigns that are necessary to win the political war. Conservatives believe in economic opportunity and individual freedom. The core of our ideas is freedom and justice for all. If we can make this intelligible to the American electorate, we will become the majority again and stop the socialist juggernaut that threatens our American future.



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