

An End to One-Sided Class Warfare

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[Eric Cantor's most recent tantrum](#) in response to the Occupy Wall Street is characterized by false outrage and political analysis that cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called rigorous, or even thoughtful. It is, however, not altogether insignificant, because Cantor's words capture right wing attitudes towards Occupy Wall Street and more generally towards those who draw attention to the rather obvious and devastating impact of recent economic history in the U.S.

Cantor's use of the word "mob" to refer to the demonstrators on Wall Street and elsewhere drew some attention, but one cannot get too upset by that one word. In politics, a mob is generally defined as a large loud group of people with whom the speaker disagrees, so Cantor can be excused for using that word. More revealing is the anger and frustration Cantor [and others](#) feel towards what they describe as "class warfare."

Republicans and other right wingers are not troubled by class warfare in the abstract, otherwise they would have said something during the last three decades when the political and financial leadership of the U.S., with the close support of the Republican, and too frequently, Democratic parties, have waged class warfare on the poor on behalf of the wealthy. Deregulation, cutting social programs and increasingly regressive tax structures have all been part of an effort to shift wealth from the poor and middle class to the wealthy. This kind of class warfare has been met with no concern at all from the right. When Republicans get upset about class warfare, what they are really angry about is that poor and working people are fighting back. That may be beginning now on Wall Street and elsewhere, leading to such concern from Cantor, Mitt Romney and other conservatives.

While much of the class warfare waged on the poor in recent decades has taken an economic form through stagnant or declining real wages for working people, tax cuts for the wealthy and the like, there has also been a psychological, even spiritual, component of class warfare as well. The right wing has sought not just to make poor people poorer, but to delegitimize the hopes, aspirations and even opinions of working people. Half a century ago, for example, labor unions were understood by many to be an important part of our political and economic system, helping ensure fair treatment for their members while contributing to the wealth and productivity of industry. Over the last quarter century or so, labor unions have been demonized as parasites dragging our economy down. Similarly, public institutions including schools, universities, libraries and social services used to be understood as playing a valuable role in expanding opportunities to all Americans ensuring that everybody who worked hard had a chance at a better life. Now these institutions are dismissed as socialism by an angry and aggressive right wing.

In this context Cantor's recent assertion that Democratic elected officials are "blaming parts of our economy and society, versus 'let's take some of the credit or blame here in Washington.'... and (they should) not go in and excoriate some who have been successful," is further evidence that Republican concern about class warfare begins only when the wealthy are targets rather than beneficiaries. It is absurd that after thirty years of scapegoating labor unions, the poor, people on welfare, people of color, single mothers, gays and lesbians, and others any Republican leader could with a straight face object to "blaming parts of our economy and society." Apparently, Cantor and the party he represents are only bothered by blaming parts of our society when it is the wealthiest and most powerful who are being blamed.

The accusations of class warfare do not seem to be getting much traction as the Occupy Wall Street movement no longer is restricted to one neighborhood in Lower Manhattan, but has spread to countless cities and towns around the US as well as to cities in other countries. Moreover, three years into a recession with unemployment and underemployment still plaguing the U.S., class warfare has lost its power as a buzzword meant to instill fear. Americans who are deeply worried about their financial future, angry at the failure to hold powerful economic actors accountable for their destructive and greedy actions are no longer in a mood to be dissuaded by Republican name calling and fear mongering.

In the next few weeks it is likely that the Republican attack on the Occupy Wall Street movement will grow even stronger as they seek to frame a movement that is beginning to enjoy the support of labor unions and Democratic politicians, as well as [the support of ordinary Americans](#) as a fringe movement led by either anarchists, Communists, spoiled hippies or some combination of the three. This will be the right wing's last stand. If they are unable to demonize the Occupy Wall Street than after more than a quarter century making class warfare, the Republicans may have finally encountered some real opposition.