Brown Shirt Tactics & Health Care Reform

Contributed by Skip Wenz
09 August 2009

When what's now called the "Brooks Brother's Brigade" disrupted the Florida presidential vote count in 2000, I realized that I'd read about similar incidents — both in Nazi Germany and in Fascist Italy. Hitler and Mussolini used organized mobs to disrupt democratic processes as they rose to power.

At the time of the Brooks Brothers Brigade incident, I did not know, but I suspected that the purported "grass roots" disrupters were in fact political operatives organized by right-wing extremists. (In any case, I wondered why the police didn't step in and throw them out of the vote-counting rooms.) It turned out that my suspicions were correct — not only were the mobsters right-wing operatives, some of them have been identified as members of former congressman Tom Delay's congressional office staff!

Fast forward to today's health care "debate" and we see the same tactics, organized by many of the same people and funded by the medical insurance industry through astroturf (fake grass-roots) groups. The instructions from the Republican Noise Machine to the goons who comprise these squads is clear — disrupt the exchange of information and bring attention to yourselves rather than the issues. The main stream media, ever ignorant of the issues, is playing along in the sense that it is focusing on the disruption rather than the health-care message, promulgating false equivalencies and helping to maintain the lie that the astroturf agents are "grass roots."

Naturally the various right-wing spokesmen — from Beck to Limbaugh — are trying to liken the health-care legislation working its way through congress to Nazi policies (see NY Times article referenced below). That's just more obfuscation and lies. Funny, I don't see an organized mob of health-care supporters shouting down the speakers at insurance company stockholders' meetings — and polls indicate that there are a lot more supporters for health care reform than there are opponents. At the moment the supporters are a sort of silent majority, though that could and should change.

Also, the Republican Noise Machine is playing the free-speech card, claiming that anyone who doesn't want meetings disrupted is trying to stifle dissent. But it's the disrupters who are trying to stifle free speech and the democratic process. The whole purpose of the town hall meetings is discussion, and those opposed to health care reform are just as free to raise their hands and, in their turn, make their comments and ask their questions. But they are not entitled to shout down the speakers, threaten them with violence and make it impossible for others to be heard. That's not free speech — it's interfering with the free speech of others.

These fascist tactics are dangerous, and should not go unchallenged. Fortunately, they are not — the Democratic National Committee put out a hard-hitting ad called "the mob is back" and other Democrats and progressives throughout the country are speaking up. It's important to 1) not be intimidated and, 2) let the main stream press hear from us — we want them to debunk the "populist" myth behind these organized protests and expose who's really behind the disruptions and disinformation campaigns.

Here's some good basic coverage of the events from the NY Times. The article doesn't mention that there is a web-site posted by one of the right-wing groups with instruction to the ditto-heads and goons on how to disrupt meetings, where meetings will be held and so on.
nytimes.com

Comment by Jan Lundberg, publisher/editor for Culture Change:

Health insurance should more properly be termed medical insurance

Health care is definitely a right, and any government should provide for the citizenry (rather than loot for corporate

cronies of top officials). But health is an individual responsibility as well. I don't refer to having to try to buy health care through insurance or taxes or out-of-pocket expenditure. Rather, in rejection of western medicine's tendency to treat mere symptoms -- with drugs and surgeries that sometimes should never be administered -- some heretics push healing for the organism by the organism. Nature and the body do the real healing, and most treatments merely intervene to alleviate pain or remove a "defective part" as if our bodies are like cars. Instead of a health system, the nation has a medical system. Health insurance in the U.S. should more properly be termed medical insurance -- after all, we are being more medicated with expensive petrochemical pharmaceuticals but we aren't doing much healing. Insurance should not be necessary except for emergencies for accidents, that is if government can't provide such a basic service. Get capitalism out of what should be a healing support system. For more on healing naturally, see Fasting for healing and inner peace, Culture Change e-Letter #92 .

* * * * *

Philip "Skip" Wenz, journalist, maintains the website
Ecotecture.com. His past reporting includes “Summitgoers push for sustainable cities” for the San Francisco Chronicle, May 10, 2008:
sfgate.com (Culure Change covered the event too at Let's fix the cities now? (Ecocities review))