

# It's not a fever or a tantrum — it's revolution without gunfire...so far

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Progressives who think that shut-down supporting House Republicans are fundamentally reasonable souls temporarily gripped by fever and throwing a temper tantrum, a fever that will break and a tantrum that will end, miss the chilling truth about the shutdown and the GOP.

The Republicans are not crazy people behaving like children — they're political extremists, zealots, behaving as revolutionaries. The shutdown and the impending debt default are the opening battles in a far right attempt to nullify the last two presidential elections and roll back progressive programs dating back not just to the New Deal, but to the days before the progressive income tax became law.

In this battle, political principles that served our nation well have been cast aside, in particular the principle that minorities have rights in democracies; the principle that distinguishes democracies from tyrannies of the majority. Democracies govern by majority while protecting the rights of minorities through a constitutional framework of enumerated and implied rights and duties, and through a political culture, evolved over time, that establishes unwritten customs and norms that mitigate imperfections in a democracy's cornerstone documents and structure. *Certain things, it is generally understood, are not to be done.* When that understanding prevails, social and governmental stability prevail.

A member of the polity who refuses to honor the general understanding destabilizes the political

system. Part of the American understanding is that political minorities do not have the right, and must not exercise a power that unwisely exists, to shut down government or default on the nation's debt to reverse the consequences of an election they lost.

But that's what's happening now. Republican reactionaries who never liked the New Deal; who wildly oppose government help in making health care available to everyone; who believe that food stamps and other programs that help the hungry violate natural law, reward sloth and sin, and offend Heaven; who especially abominate the income tax; and who keep losing presidential elections because Americans reject their cruel and selfish ideas, have taken advantage of our constitution's lack of a provision that provides a quick way of resolving budget impasses.\* They've kidnapped the nation's purse to extort at least a partial rollback of the Affordable Care Act and reduce the money available for food stamps and other assistance for the needy. Taking the nation's purse hostage is political terrorism. The GOP's weapon is its willingness to violate political norms, not an assault rifle or bomb, but it's still a weapon of revolution.

Never dismiss a political group's behavior as irrational or petulant without first considering that behavior from the group's point of view. *Speaker Boehner, Paul Ryan, et al, know exactly what they're doing.* They believe they'll get away with it because they believe President Obama and the Democrats won't

have enough steel in their spines to ignore the howls of economic pain. That's a cold-blooded calculation, not an irrational belief or a tantrum. The president blinked in 2011. They're convinced he'll blink again and agree to nullify the ACA — or, that he'll suspend the debt ceiling on his own authority, citing the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, or providing another rationale.

The House Republicans would welcome the latter outcome as much as they'd welcome a first blink from the White House as it would give them an excuse to impeach the President, whom they consider unworthy of his office and perhaps even not constitutionally qualified for it.

Boehner and his boys won't stop revolting until the people who fund their campaigns tell them to fund the government or find themselves defunded and facing political extinction — and until the people who sent them to Congress stop voting on autopilot and begin exercising their franchise responsibly.

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\*In a parliamentary democracy such as Canada's or the United Kingdom's, a budgetary crisis would be settled by calling a new election. The voters would break the deadlock. In our constitutional democracy with elections at fixed intervals, that kind of quickly breaking a deadlock is not possible. I regard it as a flaw in our constitution, and as a particularly dangerous flaw.