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Bush's Class Warfare

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Just a week before Christmas, President Bush gave corporate America two big presents. On Tuesday, his Federal Communications Commission changed the rules to allow the nation's giant conglomerates to further consolidate their grip on the media by permitting them to purchase TV and radio stations in the same local markets where they already own daily newspapers. As a gift to the country's automobile industry, Bush's Environmental Protection Agency ruled Wednesday, over the objections of the agency's staff, that California, the nation's largest and most polluted state, and 16 other states, can't impose regulations to limit greenhouse gases from cars and trucks that are stronger than the federal government's own weak standards.

So far, no major politicians or editorial writers have labeled these actions "class warfare," although this is precisely what Bush is engaged in -- helping the already rich and powerful at the expense of everyone else. Class warfare is, in fact, the very essence of Bush's tenure in the White House. In thousands of ways, big and small, Bush has promoted the interests of the very rich and the largest corporations. Corporate lobbyists have the run of the White House. Their agenda - tax cuts for the rich and big business, attacks on labor unions, and the weakening of laws protecting consumers, workers and the environment from corporate abuse - is Bush's agenda.

For example, Bush has handed the pharmaceutical industry windfall profits by restricting Medicare's ability to negotiate for lower prices for medicine. He targeted huge no-bid federal contracts to crony companies like Haliburton to supply emergency relief, reconstruction services and materials to rebuild Katrina while attempting to slash federal wage laws for reconstruction workers. He repealed Clinton-era "ergonomics" standards, affecting more than 100 million workers, that would have forced companies to alter their work stations, redesign their facilities or change their tools and equipment if employees suffered serious work-related injuries from repetitive motions. He opposed stiffer health and safety regulations to protect mine workers and cut the budget for federal agencies that enforce mine safety laws. Not surprisingly, under Bush, we've seen the largest number of mine accidents and deaths in years. Bush's Food and Drug Administration lowered product-labeling standards, allowing food makers to list health claims on labels before they have been scientifically proven. His FDA chief announced that the agency would no longer require claims to be based on "significant scientific agreement," a change that the National Food Processors Association, the trade association of the \$500 billion food processing industry, had lobbied for. Bush resisted efforts to raise the minimum wage (which had been stuck at \$5.15 an hour for nine years) until the Democrats took back the Congress earlier this year.

Virtually every week since he took office, the Bush administration has made or proposed changes in our laws designed to help the rich and powerful while harming the most vulnerable people in society and putting the middle class at greater economic risk. The list of horrors can be so numbing that one can lose sight of the cumulative impact of these actions. Taken together, they add up to the most direct assault on working people, the environment and the poor that the country has seen since the presidency of William McKinley over a century ago.

Bush has been a persistent practitioner of top-down class warfare, but the media rarely characterize his actions that way. In contrast, when progressive activists, unions, environmental groups, community organizations and politicians support legislation

and rules to redress the balance of power and wealth, they are inevitably described as engaging in class warfare. Top-down class warfare seems to be OK, but bottom-up class warfare is apparently a no-no.

The class warfare rap is now being used against John Edwards, when he talks about challenging the power of the insurance and drug corporations. In a recent speech, Edwards said that his campaign was about challenging "the powerful, the well-connected and the very wealthy." But wary of being criticized for fueling class resentments, even Edwards felt it necessary to say "This is not class warfare. This is the truth."

Yes, the truth is that the rich have been at war with the rest of the country. It isn't a question of "rich against the poor," which is often how leftists describe things. That leaves out most Americans. It's the very rich versus everyone else.

As Robert Kuttner observes in his new book, *The Squandering of America*, from 1966 to 2001, the wealthiest one-tenth of all Americans captured the lion's share of society's productivity growth. But it was the top one tenth of 1 percent that gained the very most. Those between the 80th and 90th percentiles about held their own. Those between the 95th and 99th percentiles gained 29 percent, while those between the top 99 and 99.9 percentile, gained 73 percent.

"But," Kuttner writes, "it was those at the very pinnacle --the top one tenth of 1 percent of the population - one American in a thousand - who gained a staggering 291 percent."

Wealth has become even more concentrated during the Bush years. Today, the richest one percent of Americans has 22 percent of all income and about 40 percent of all wealth. This is the biggest concentration of income and wealth since 1928. In 2005, average CEO pay was 369 times that of the average worker, compared with 131 times in 1993 and 36 times in 1976. At the pinnacle of America's economic pyramid, the nation's 400 billionaires own 1.25 trillion dollars in total net worth - the same amount as the 56 million American families at the bottom half of wealth distribution.

Meanwhile, despite improvements in productivity, the earnings of most workers have been stagnant, while the cost of health care, housing, and other necessities has risen. The basics of the American Dream - the ability to buy a home, pay for college tuition and health insurance, take a yearly vacation, and save for retirement - have become increasingly slippery. And for the 37 million Americans living below the official poverty line - \$17,170 a year for a family of three - the dream has become a nightmare.

In many ways, America today resembles the conditions in the late 1800s that was called the Gilded Age. It was an era of rampant, unregulated capitalism. It was a period of merger mania, increasing concentrations of wealth among the privileged few, and growing political influence by corporate power brokers called the Robber Barons. During the Gilded Age, new technologies made possible new industries, which generated great riches for the fortunate few, but at the expense of workers, consumers, and the environment. The gap between the rich and other Americans widened dramatically.

It was also an era of massive immigration to the US from people fleeing political persecution and economic hardship. In the growing cities of the early 20th century, there were terrible poverty, child labor, sweatshops, slums, and serious public health crises, including major epidemics of contagious diseases.

But out of that turmoil, activists created a "Progressive" movement, forging a coalition of immigrants, unionists, middle-class reformers, settlement house workers, muckraking journalists, clergy, and upper-class philanthropists. They fought for, and won, better working conditions, better housing, better schools, and better public services like sanitation and public health laws. Those reforms began at the local and state levels, but eventually laid the foundation for a wave of reform at the federal level - the New Deal.

In 1939, in the midst of the Great Depression, the balladeer Woody Guthrie wrote a song about bank robbers and outlaws. "Yes, as through this world I've wandered, I've seen lots of funny men," Guthrie wrote, "Some will rob you with a six-gun, and some with a fountain pen."

Throughout his Presidency, Bush has used his pen to sign regulations and laws that make the rich richer, allow big business to pollute the environment, reduce wages, and rip-off borrowers and consumers.

But Americans finally seem to have caught on. Iraq, Katrina, Enron, the current wave of foreclosures, and other events have helped wake them up to the reality that Bush's top-down class warfare has done great damage to our country. We now may be on the brink of another progressive era. Bubbling below the surface is a new wave of social activism.

Today's progressive movement is almost invisible to the mainstream media, but it is obvious to anyone involved in the struggle for social justice. It has many of the same elements as 100 years ago. There is a new wave of activism across America among labor unions, community organizations, environmental groups, immigrant rights activists, and grassroots housing and health care reformers. In the last decade, for example, more than 150 cities, dozens of counties, and now one state (Maryland) have adopted "living wage" laws to lift low-wage workers out of poverty, the result of solid organizing efforts by networks of unions, religious congregations, and community groups like ACORN and the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy. Environmentalists and unions - who were barely on speaking terms for many years - are now forging alliances to push for "green" jobs and waging joint campaigns, such as the coalition of Teamsters and environmental activists working together to clean up the Los Angeles/Long Beach port, the nation's largest port and also its most polluted, and unionize the immigrant truck drivers.

Like the Progressive and New Deal eras, there is now a growing number of politicians at the local, state and national level who

help give voice to this burgeoning movement. When they do, they are accused of engaging in "class warfare." They should wear it as a badge of honor.

Peter Dreier is E.P. Clapp Distinguished Professor of Politics, and director of the Urban and Environmental Policy program, at Occidental College in Los Angeles.

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George Bush enriching the already rich? Who would have thought such a thing could happen? Only the giant corporations that bought the White House for him.

Every day there is yet another story about yet another attack on the shrinking middle-class. Given another Republican administration, America will become a two tier society; the aristocracy and their serfs.

Gamma Rose

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Bush is a tool of the capitalists and wealthiest one percent of society. His American dream is one of tent cities and soup lines and wealthy capitalists like in the 1920's. No safety net at all would be his solution. Dismantle the New Deal entirely. After all, if government actually worked in the interests of people, people may view government favorably and vote Democratic.

As is suggested in the post, Bush has dismantled safety and ergonomic standards, as is ideological forefathers dismantled banking regulations. As a result, we have the sub-prime mortgagae crisis with thousands losing their homes. Now our bridges collapse and our mines cave-in with workers killed. Our children play with toys with lead in them. Our levees fail.

Where is the media and public outrage, the marches on the White House demanding a restoration of our rights and liberties. Bush is so detached from this reality he sleeps comfortably at night. Thousands die in Iraq and tens of thousands more are maimed and Bush sleeps comfortably.

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This is the New Gilded Age and it should never have been allowed to happen! What became of anti-trust laws in this country? I'd never vote for Ron Paul, but I do like the libertarian idea of smaller government. The administration has just too many aides, lawyers, and sycophants, etc. who manage all the intricacies of government, and rewrite laws according to their whims. It's like a shell game, or "watch the birdy!" We're so distracted by one crisis after another, who can keep track of what the hell the slimy bastards are doing? Shock Doctrine is right!

If the House isn't going to start impeachment hearings against Cheney/Bush, then I think it's time for a Constitutional Convention. Although right now the American economy resembles that of the 1700s (the privileged ruling class elite and then everyone else,) "we the people" are much more educated today, and we actually have the capacity to think for ourselves. It's time to create some new laws that will protect us from the neoliberals and robber barons. If they love capitalism so much along with their billions of \$\$\$, then they need to be taxed accordingly, as well as take their lumps when their businesses fail. Isn't capitalism about being rewarded for taking risks? If you take the risk and fail, well, better luck next time! No federal bail outs!

We should have learned our lesson from history and seen this New Gilded Age coming. Although I'm not sure we've ever before had a president, who until this year when the Dems gained control of Congress, never vetoed anything, but instead used signing statements over 700 times to overrule Congress in an attempt to create a unilateral government.

It's long past time for a change. Oh yeah, we might as well throw out the Electoral College while we're at it...another anachronism

past its smell test.

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Without gaining control of the US monetary system, any Democratic president, no matter how reform-minded, we be outsmarted and outflanked by the money power every time. The Federal Reserve System centralized banking power under the Wall Street Money Trust that uses massive public debt to finance wars.

Supply-side tax cuts for the upper brackets have resulted in more spending on imported consumer products and asset bubbles rather than domestic industrial growth. In the long run, both deficit spending and taxation should be minimized.

The federal government deliberately causes inflation to reduce the cost of national debt and generate more tax revenues. COLAs compounded annually produce a major devaluation of the dollar over a period of several years.

The Federal Reserve System is skewed away from infrastructure investment toward private sector speculation. It set up a monetary system suitable for a military empire, not an industrial democracy. We continually engage in military conquest.

The main function of the Federal Reserve Board is price stability. This protects the investments and income of the banks. This is done by wage and salary constraints by maintaining unemployed or underemployed workers.

The word "price stability" is the conservative code for "class warfare." I think John Edwards realizes that NAFTA and the WTO and the Federal Reserve System create high inflation coinciding with war or preparation for war, stagnant wages, and tremendous concentration of wealth among the richest people.

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Populism is the cure for the cancer of runaway corporatism. BushCo IS fascist!!

No one system has ever worked particularly well and blends that suit the customs and the times seem to be best for all, so when corporatism devolves into blatant fascism, it's time the pendulum swings strongly to the left.

Power held by a few, to the benefit of the few has stripped the middle class of it's wealth, endangering the engines of our economy. Giant corporations have tilted the playing field away from smaller businesses that offer both more efficiencies and more employment opportunities. The big corps claim both are contradictory but for the market on the whole, it's very true. Giant corporations are harmful to all of US.

Where the public has common needs, services are best provided, not for profit. The GOP argues this is backwards but that is because they represent those who would profit! Single payer is the only way to go with health care but our Congress is too corrupted to venture there. Well regulated capitalism and rational socialism are both the enemy of the GOP but the friend of we the people.

Populism is the cure for the cancer of corporate fascism. Edwards can deliver!

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Class Warfare. It would be defined by the media, the Republicans, the rich and the large corporations as the poor and middle class having the audacity to demand, fight for or even beg for some fairness in the political and economic system. But "Class Warfare" from the top down? Why, that's absurd! Its an oxymoron. Only a communist would think such a thing possible. Warren Buffet pays taxes at about half the rate of the people who work for him. When the right wingers talk about him it's like they are talking about the second coming, until Mr Buffet speaks about the unfairness of tax rates for the rich versus the poor or about the inheritance taxes. Then, all of a sudden he is a senile, deluded idiot who should keep his hateful ideas to himself. How did the Republicans, The Class Warfare Party, project their evil onto the Democrats and make it stick? Near total control of the media and a genius for propaganda. This has always been the forte of fascists.

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Politics *is* class warfare. That's the point of politics.

Though with the cruel and overt theft of so much financial and ecological wealth by the elite, the 'warfare' metaphor has never been so appropriate.

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Peter Dreier: Bush's Class Warfare

you write: "But Americans finally seem to have caught on Bubbling below the surface is a new wave of social activism."

Really???, I think your view is part of the problem because nothing has been happening, or appears to be happening, nothing of real substance. All around there appears to be apathy, greed and self-service, even from national, state and local politicians. They all appear to be covering their own ass and are afraid, exactly afraid of what, I don't know.? A prime example is the US congress - recent AP headline "Majority Democrats' Power Checked by GOP"

No Mr. Dreier, people continue to put up with shit all around them, at - work, grocery store, gas station, home, and how do they placate themselves? by - buying buying buying. How is it that consumer spending is up when people have no savings, extended credit, inflation, and dwindling home equity?

People are digging themselves deeper in a whole, and because of this, they are going to have to put up with more shit - which means even greater apathy, whether they like it or not.

No Mr. Dreier, there is only fear, I'm sure you see it all around you too.

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Mr. Dreier, the Bush assault on the working class in this country is remarkable for the methodical and consistent fashion in which it has been worked. Is it unreasonable to suggest that any business or employer who cannot pay a "living wage" has no business being in business?

One can make a good case that the Bush family is one of the worst things that have ever happened to this country. They can't even pretend to give a shit about the poor.

Corporate media is nothing but a marketing machine for capitalists. Capitalism without conscience is the problem. As long as we live in the United Christian Corporate States of America we deserve what we get!

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Newspapers are dying. I would think it natural for said organizations to branch out before they disappear.

I'm not sure you have made, or even tried to make the case that's it bad for the little guy in light of today's on-line world to have newspaper owners branching out to other media in areas where they operate.

I read the newspapers around the globe on-line. I read broadcast news sites around the globe. Public radio and TV is global on-line. Liberal and conservative blogs. Commentator web sites. UTube users with cell phones capturing news events.

often there are 67 channels and nothing on, my friend.

I think the internet and cable TV have changed the equation and we are in NO danger of seeing the far left or the far right take total control of global News or commentary.

In my opinion, your desire to spew against President Bush has you mixing too much fantasy with your facts to reach conclusions that are not justified.

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Great blog, but overwhelming when so much "Bad Sh*t" is presented in one place. "Outrage Fatigue" is gettin' me down, so off to the beach for some relief. I'll get pissed off all over again tomorrow.....Ya'll have a happy holiday.

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Those gosh darn evil American companies that employ us little people....how dare Bush help us...er....I mean them!

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Of course you know it's only called Class Warfare when the underclass attempts to assert itself.

When the proprietor class enriches itself, often straight out of the public treasury, this is known as the Free Market in action, democracy, freedom, God, and the redwhiteandblue.

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Peter Dreier: Bush's Class Warfare

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Add to that a tax rate that charges around 35% to most working Americans while the ultra rich get paid in stock and then pay a rate of 15% which can then be sheltered. The rich are making our country very ill.

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don't say that! there are many things the individual can do. like shop locally to keep your tax dollars in your community. pay the extra two dollars for that shirt. finance another 500 on your car. by purchasing everything at wal mart, you are putting the power in the hands of the elite.

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