
REMAPPING DEBATE

Asking "Why" and "Why Not"

Protesters take Democrats to task

Photo Essays | By Mike Alberti | Corporate influence, Politics

April 20, 2011 — At a time when many high-profile liberals are breathing a sigh of relief after President Obama seemed to give a nod to his base in his budget address last week, another constituency is vocally arguing that progressives should abandon the Democrats altogether.

On Friday Apr. 15, hundreds of people gathered at a rally in New York City's Union Square. While the demonstration was purposefully staged on Tax Day to draw attention to the fact that many large corporations will not pay taxes this year, the underlying message was that Democratic voters have been abandoned by the Democratic party and that progressives need to organize around what protesters describe as "key liberal values" — values they say have been forgotten by most Democratic office-holders. The cause of this disconnect, many demonstrators argued, can be traced back to the increasing influence of corporate interests in Washington.

Here's what some of them had to say.



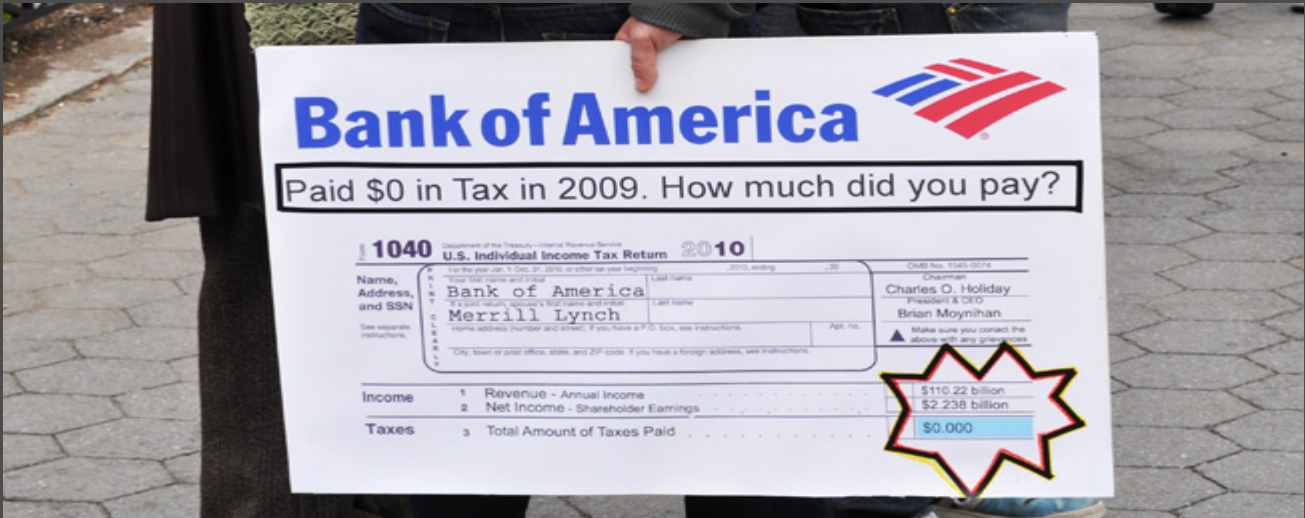
“The Democratic Party kills movements. The labor movement was destroyed by it. They put in hundreds of millions of dollars a year and lots of volunteer hours into Democratic campaigns. And if that money instead went to a real labor party that was concerned about working peoples’ issues, then we’d have a real third party in this country.”

— *Kevin Zeese, Baltimore, Maryland*



Zeese’s idea of a U.S. labor party resonated with Robert Tursky, from Valley Stream, Rhode Island. Tursky, a member of a marble-workers union, has been unemployed for two years, he said, along with 90 percent of the other members in his union. In a few weeks, his unemployment insurance is going to run out, he said. Tursky finds it ironic that the government can’t afford to pay him unemployment, but has enough money to fund two wars.

“[Taxpayer] money is going to war and not to the people. We have nothing for the people and it’s all going to war. It’s nonsense.”



Margaret Flowers, a pediatrician who left practice four years ago to advocate for single-payer health care, said that she is learning that it's nearly impossible to advance certain policy ideas “until we end the corporate stranglehold on our political process and our media.”

Flowers said the Democrats are just as implicated in this “stranglehold” as the Republicans. During the debate over healthcare reform, she said, “what we saw is that so much of the left allied themselves with the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party is another corporate party. They don’t represent the needs of the people.”



Chris Hedges, a journalist, activist and author who spoke at the rally, said that over the last several decades, all of the pillars of liberal values — including the Democratic party — have been co-opted by corporate influence.

“[Democrats] don’t serve our interests anymore,” he said. “The longer we collaborate with them, the more disempowered we become. Civil disobedience is the only option we have left.”



Rudy Avizius, from Audobon, New Jersey, said he had come to the rally because, to him, the connection between tax breaks and austerity measures currently being promoted in Washington by both Democrats and Republicans does not make sense.

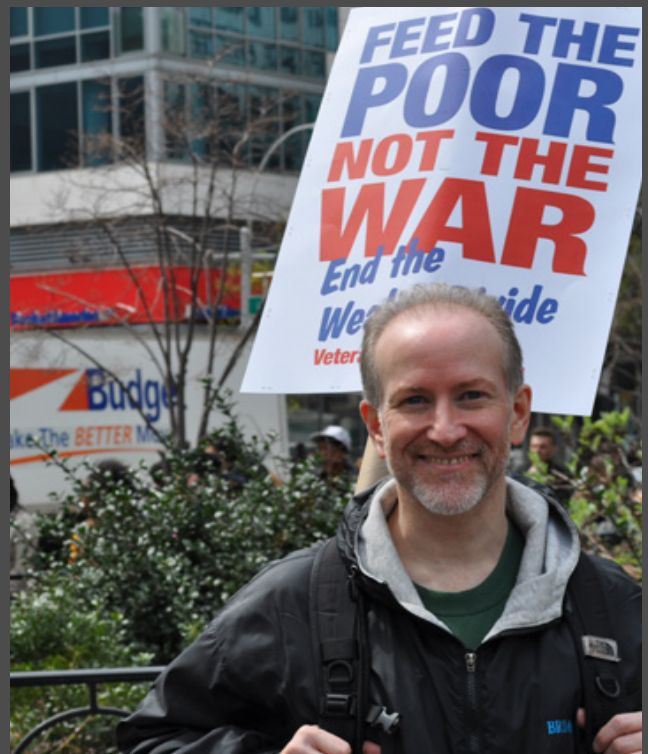
“Bank of America is paying no taxes. Most people don’t realize that two out of three corporations are paying no taxes. Then they tell us that they have to cut the budgets for early childhood education, they’re talking about throwing veterans into homelessness, they’re talking about cutting aid to pregnant women and children, but these people aren’t paying their taxes. To me, there’s something morally wrong with that,” he said.

“I think the root cause – anything else we do is just nibbling at the edges – but to get to the root cause of the problem, we need public financing of campaigns,” Avizius added. “That way you don’t have these politicians who are like addicts, dependent on this money supply coming in to keep themselves reelected.”

Brian Wonsever from New York City agreed with Avizius that campaign finance reform is needed.

“We also need to nationalize the large multi-national corporations to negate their impact on our political process,” he said.

“What’s happened in our country is that the organizations in government that are supposed to [represent workers] are basically paying lip service to the American public. They’re giving us the belief that we have these protections, but we no longer do.”





This content originally appeared at <http://remappingdebate.org/photo-essay/protesters-take-democrats-task>