

2010: Year of the Economic Crumble

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The tenth year of the 21st Century has left us behind, and it can't be too soon.

It was a year of the crumble.

The economy continued to crumble for ordinary people with little hope for a quick turnaround even as some markets surged. The hopes of the jobless for employment crumbled. The faith of the so many homeowners that they will find a way to stay in their homes facing foreclosure crumbled.

And so have the hopes of so many of us that our new Change Is Coming president would fight for us, would end the wars, would close Gitmo, would abandon torture, would make healthcare more affordable, would give us a government we could believe in; that, too, has crumbled.

Look back at the devastation of the year gone by its ugly election, bought and paid for by US Supreme Court sanctioned special interests, oil spilled by the Gulf-ful, wars escalated, climate change unabated, and Wall Street unchecked and we have to scratch our heads and wonder who is crazier, them or us.

For many of us, WikiLeaks was at least something to admire but even there, what we have learned is that we are still being lied to; trust, too, is crumbling.

Illusions die hard but die they do.

A year after the earthquake, rubble is still piled up in the streets of Haiti, which has received only 2% of the money raised to reconstruct it. We now have six active military operations underway, rating less and less coverage, only 4% of the network news fare by one count.

In contrast, the partisan wars are all TV News covered over and over again, with Fox charging, MSNBC responding, and Jon Stewart joking.

And yes, we need, oh do we ever, need humor. Laughing always beats crying.

Hats off to our humorists and satirists, and writers of parodies and timely humor -The Andy Borowitzs', The Onion crowd, the Lee Papas, the Lizz Winstead's, Driftglass, Baratunde Thurston, Lee "fox is a festival of ignorance and parade of propaganda" Camp, Jeff Kreisler, et.al to keep us sane, to make us realize the absurdity of what we are dealing with, so we don't feel compelled to marshal facts to slay arguments that have none, and don't, literally or metaphorically, do a "Mark Madoff" in the darkness of our bedrooms.

Clowns have always masked and helped us cope with the deeper pains we carry with us.

Yet, “rallies to restore sanity” have proven less effective than rallies for authoritarianism. Muslim bashing and the nightly Fox snarl designed to inflame and incite as the polarization deepens with every day. If you think it’s been bad, just wait as the new DC Congress, and its hanger-ons dominate the discourse. Even Dick Cheney is getting back into the act, again. .

There seems to be nowhere to go but down.

The pragmatic compromisers of the democratic center may convince themselves they are “getting it done” in DC, but they are also alienating the Democratic Party base and disgusting all those who believed it would be or could be different. Some bills were passed in the lame duck session with greater symbolic value than substance. The Democrats seemed to have done more after they lost than when they ruled the roost.

Now it seems clear, they will move further to the right in a Clintonian bid to co-opt the Republicans by trashing the unions and slicing the safety net as the poor grow in numbers and silence.

Already, there are new escalations in Afghanistan, a rising military budget that went unmentioned upon, and more repressive laws to come.

There will be a price to be paid for their legacy of spinelessness and corporate complicity.

The media still remains at the center of our conundrum, as we argued ten years ago when we founded the media issues network, Mediachannel.org, to advocate for fundamental media change. That movement was co-opted by well-funded groups like Free Press that discouraged media activism to promote inside the beltway lobbying. Look at the smoking ruins of their long and pricey fight for net neutrality and you can see where that got us. Organizations like Media Matters come up with valuable revelations but exist to push partisanship, not media change.

So we are left where we started, as David Swanson argues, with the need to support independent media, arguing “we need an alternative not only to Fox News but also to the rest of the corporate media. This is the easiest and most important project anyone can work on. The dream of persuading the labor movement (which can’t even strongly oppose corporate trade agreements when the president is a Democrat) to invest in a new television network should be abandoned. If the George Soros’s of the world haven’t figured out that there’s a communications problem, they never will. But we already have what we need; we just need to make it bigger, and we can do so. We should invest in TheRealNews.com, Thom Hartmann, Free Speech TV, Link TV, GRIT TV, Democracy Now, Pacifica Radio, community radio stations, blogs and web sites.

We should make use of foreign outlets that, for their own reasons, are willing to provide decent coverage of US politics: Al Jazeera, ATN, RT-America, etc. Unsubscribe from the New York Times, stop contributing to any purchasing of ads in it, stop reading it, and read the Guardian online instead. Get connected online, and people will send you the occasional good article or video that all lousy outlets produce. Share that one further, but promote a good website that’s hosting it, not the corporate source.”

And let’s also get behind WikiLeaks as they fight for transparency and accountability by governments and media. We need to support not only Mediachannel but sites like CrooksandLiars.com, FiredogLake.com, Global Research, Consortium News, Z Net, Huff Post,

Op Ed News, etc., etc.

At the same time, we have to go back to an old idea for which online interaction and an email barrage is no substitute: organizing real people.

There are more of us than they there are of them but they are organized and focused and we are mostly reactive and emotional. They are strategic and we are tactical, easily outraged by personalities like Sarah Palin, and their inflammatory statements, with no orchestrated agenda of our own except to raise money for politicians we really can't trust.

We seem to have lost the capacity for independent political action

As James Kwak wrote on Baseline Scenario, there is a reason for this. Progressives are captured by symbolic politics while the right is committed to substantive goals. He cites the view of Murray Edelman who divides the political sphere into insiders and outsiders.

"Insiders are basically special interests: small in number but well organized and with specific goals. Outsiders, or the "unorganized masses," are the rest of us: we have some interests, but we are poorly organized to pursue them and therefore are generally unsuccessful. In particular, Outsiders suffer from poor and limited information, and therefore are especially susceptible to political symbols."

He cites Arnold Kling's summary of Edelman's insights:

"Given these differences, the Insiders use overt political dramas as symbols that placate the masses while using covert political activity to plunder them. What we would now call rent-seeking succeeds because Outsiders are dazzled by the symbols while Insiders grab the substance."

A lesson of 2010: we have to reject this thinking and find ways to work together and educate each other, or find ourselves further marginalized.

Happy "News" Year and new decade.

News Dissector Danny Schechter edits Mediachannel.org with editorial support from "dissectrix" Cherie Welch. In 2011, we will be launching a campaign for a "jailout, "not a bailout on Wall Street as called for in the film PLUNDER The Crime of Our Time. (Plunderthecrimeofourtime.com)

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The Global Economic Crisis



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