

Romney the Bully

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Last week, I was invited to speak to 40 high school freshman about human rights. When we discussed the right to be free from torture, I asked the students if they could think of an example of torture. They said, "bullying." A major problem among teens, bullying can lead to depression, and even suicide. When most people list the qualities they want to see in their President, "bully" is not one of them.

Yet evidence continues to emerge that Mitt Romney is a bully. When he was a high school senior at the prestigious Cranbrook School, Romney orchestrated and played the primary role in forcibly pinning fellow student John Lauber to the ground and clipping the terrified Lauber's hair. The soft-spoken Lauber, it seemed, had returned from spring break with bleached-blond hair draped over one eye. Romney, infuriated, declared, "He can't look like that. That's wrong. Just look at him!" Lauber eyes filled with tears as he screamed for help. One of the other students in the dorm at the time, said, "It was a hack job . . . It was vicious."

But instead of owning up to his stupidity and expressing regret at his bullying attack on Lauber, Romney told Fox News that he didn't remember the incident, although he apologized for his pranks that "might have gone too far." It's hard to believe that Romney cannot recall an incident that others who assisted in the attack have regretted for years. Or perhaps there were so many more that he doesn't recall this one.

Lauber wasn't the only student Romney harassed. Gary Hummel, a gay student who had not yet come out, says Romney shouted, "Atta girl!" when Hummel spoke out in English class. Once again, Romney claims he doesn't remember that insult.

In still another high school incident, Romney caused English teacher Carl Wonnberger, who had severe vision problems, to smack into a closed door, after which Romney laughed hysterically.

While these episodes demonstrate cruelty, one might dismiss them as the work of an immature high school prankster. But, unfortunately, Romney's bullying didn't end in high school. Romney is now famous for driving to Canada with the family dog caged and strapped to the roof of his car.

Moreover, Romney made a career of bullying when he was head of private equity firm Bain Capital. Bain would invest in companies, load them up with debt, and then sell them for huge profits. The companies often had to lay off workers and sometimes were forced into bankruptcy.

The Wall Street Journal found that of the 77 companies in which Bain invested while Romney

headed it from 1984 to 1999, 22 percent filed for bankruptcy or went out of business. In addition, Bain hid its profits in tax havens.

William D. Cohan, a Wall Street deal-adviser for 17 years, wrote in the Washington Post: "Seemingly alone among private-equity firms," Bain Capital under Romney's leadership "was a master at bait-and-switching Wall Street bankers to get its hands on the companies that provided the raw material for its financial alchemy." Cohan said Bain "did all that it could to game the system."

For 28 years, Joe Soptic was a steelworker at Worldwide Grinding Systems. Soptic told Amy Goodman that after the company was bought out in 1993, his wife had to quit working, she didn't have health insurance, and he couldn't afford to buy it after his salary was reduced from \$59,000 to \$24,800 annually. When his wife became ill with cancer, she went to a county hospital. When she died, he said, "I had this big bill." Soptic was forced to liquidate his 401(k)s, which are now gone. He lost his job after the company declared bankruptcy under the control of Bain. While 750 workers lost their jobs, Bain made billions of dollars in profit. Bain denied workers the severance pay and health insurance they had been promised, and their retirement benefits were reduced by as much as \$400 a month.

Randy Johnson had worked for nine years at an office supply factory in Marion, Indiana, when American Pad and Paper, which had been acquired by Bain, bought out the factory in 1994. Johnson was hired back, but without a union contract. He lost his pension plan, and his wages and benefits were reduced. After an unsuccessful effort to negotiate a contract, the plant closed. Johnson and more than 250 of his fellow workers were fired. Johnson, who had tried to get Romney's attention during the labor dispute, said, "I really think [Romney] didn't care about the workers. It was all about profit over people."

A bully does not care whom he may hurt by his tormenting behavior. He intimidates the vulnerable for his own benefit, or amusement. He lacks compassion. Romney fits this profile.

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