

Playing with Dynamite, Tossing Numbers Around Like Grenades

Written by Alex Baer

Monday, 26 November 2012 23:44 - Last Updated Tuesday, 27 November 2012 22:50

The numbers are up: We now have 50 million people in our country who are poor -- while online sales on Black Friday busted one billion bucks for the first time.

The increased stats on the poor stem from a new census measure that considers medical costs and work-related expenses. The new formula also means there are more people now living below the poverty line than in 2010 -- about 16% of the population.

Interestingly, online sales from November 1st this year are also up 16% -- from the same period last year -- while the number of Americans visiting online shops this Black Friday was 57.3 million, an increase of 18%. Cyber Monday sales were expected to push past 1.5 billion dollars.

Now, what do you suppose anyone will make of those two radically different sets of numbers, slammed together and asked to play nicely together?

Well, one view will no doubt say more and more Americans are simply failing to pull on their bootstraps, or silver spoons, and connections in commerce and in Congress. An alternate view will unsurprisingly hold forth that greed and gluttony continue to hold considerably more sway over fairness or equitable workings.

Neither of these views is new. The numbers themselves aren't either -- just more increases, and more all the time. Pretty old hat, the two sets of stats running in opposite directions on the charts, rocketing away from one another, fast.

Whatever your philosophy and point of view, one thing is becoming clearer by the nanosecond: The gap between the Have Everythings and the Have Nothings is growing faster than ever.

Take the new report that looked at incomes before Bush's Great Recession. It found the gap growing between rich and poor in 45 states and the District of Columbia. A report by Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s, incomes fell about

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6% among the bottom fifth of households, but rose by 8.6% for the top fifth.

It's no longer just a gap. It's push and jam one side down *here*, so it pops up sky high over *there*.

No surprise the poor are being flattened and the wealthy continue to rise to new heights.

A co-author of the report, Elizabeth McNichol, told ABC, "For decades now, those benefits [of growth] have been skewed in favor of the wealthiest members of society."

Translation to even plainer speaking: If the *American Dream* ever was, it's been turning into the *American Nightmare* for more people all the time. The poor can't ever wake up, and the wealthy simply don't want to.

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In Spain, as in many European countries, the word of the year is Austerity. So far, no country has managed to "austere" itself back to economic vitality and good health.

Many if not most economists -- those no longer laboring under the delusion of trickle down or voodoo stews of cooking the books -- understand an austere approach is exactly the wrong cure, 180 degrees away from a helpful solutions involving stimulation. However, many politicians and many lay people will continue to blame other challenges for their financial woes.

Spain, like many countries, is seeing a rise of a scavenger class, one might say -- people who dumpster-dive, looking for items of value to recycle and sell. As they say, one person's trash is another's treasure, and some people make something like a living by scrounging.

You've probably seen some of that here, in America, and not known which scourge to blame: homelessness, eviction, unemployment, medical bankruptcy, methamphetamine or other addictions... It's a long list that gets longer and snares more people every day.

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Perhaps that's why it is so inconceivably vile that someone is paid \$40 to \$50 million a year, every year, to churn up the ugliest forms of hate speech possible -- someone who would suggest that hungry children should check their local dumpsters for food.

Yes, it's been a couple years since Rush Limbaugh came up with that one, but it's certainly memorable, especially coming from someone who blew out his hearing with illicit drug use, and went on to call a young woman testifying before Congress a slut.

Somehow, Rush is still spewing on the public like a busted sewer line, via the public's own airwaves, his bloviations and bombastic babblings carried whole-heartedly by Clear Channel Communications, coast to coast, courtesy of Bain.

Which saying is most appropriate here -- vultures of a feather flock together? You are known by the vile company you keep? Guilt by association is still guilt for all? *Gee -- there are so many good ones to pick from, perhaps we should take them all, as a package deal.*

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Meanwhile, it's been a lost decade, if not more, for wages, with stagnation of buying power and raises throttling most wage earners.

Researchers at the Hamilton Project, part of the Brookings Institution, recently calculated that the median working-age man with a job earns about 4% less than he did in 1970, when adjusted for inflation.

These threads all lead to the same place. Put all this information alongside disappearing manufacturing jobs, the type most gutted by vulture capitalists and catapulted overseas. These are the jobs that used to be available for blue collar workers here at home. That they no longer are should trip every alarm bell in our heads.

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It used to be widely known that the only way to true wealth and a healthy economy is through a solid manufacturing base. The, people started playing around with tricky, highly inventive and creative ways to show wealth on paper, and boring old manufacturing dropped off the hot list of dalliances for the idle rich.

Of course, we can always have paper wealth, con ourselves we're doing fine, and wait for that Big Bubble of Horror to pop, ala 1929. Meanwhile, we can give each other haircuts, tattoos, nail jobs and piercings, and hope to resurrect our standard of living and pull up our low-flying GDP via that icy polar route.

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If you're looking for signs our leaders have things well in hand and we're just about ready to turn that Big Corner on history, into a Land of Growth, you have a wait coming.

(Meanwhile, I would be in favor of getting Warren Buffett into the government policy loop, tag-teamed with Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont as his guide. All in favor, rise and say **Hell, yes!**)

Speaking of whom, Buffett was making more sense again on Monday -- as he seems to do every day -- suggesting in an op-ed piece that the rich could very easily continue to fly high after hike on their income taxes, writing, "...forget about the rich and ultra-rich going on strike and stuffing their ample funds under their mattresses if -- gasp -- capital gains rates and ordinary income taxes are increased."

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Wonder why it is, we're generating so much sudden, theatrical concern in this country -- that we need to drop everything and call in the bomb squad, right now, to take care of the fast- and slow-burning coiled fuses snaking around 8 years of Dubya's megaton deficits?

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Wonder why everyone's forgotten we are at historically low tax rates?

Perhaps we should pass around some tax rate tables of the past to the rich -- tables showing tax rates north of 70% or so -- that may help squelch some of the parasitic bellyaching from the obscenely rich.

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There's a most interesting piece at AlterNet by college teacher, author, and the founder and developer of social justice and educational websites, Paul Buccheit. It is called, *Ten Numbers the Rich Would Like Fudged*.

He points out insightful and startling facts, like these:

- Only four out of 150 countries have more wealth inequality -- that income gap -- than us. This means that the U.S. has greater wealth inequality -- a bigger income gap -- than every country in the world, except for Namibia, Zimbabwe, Denmark, and Switzerland.
- An amount equal to one half the nation's GDP is held overseas by the rich, untaxed -- about \$8 to \$12 trillion, with a "T" in all.
- Just ten Americans accumulated \$50 billion in one year -- enough to pay the salaries of a million nurses, teachers, or emergency responders. It's also enough, for example, to feed 870 million people in the world who do not have enough food.
- Tax deductions for the rich could pay off 100% of the deficit.

All in favor of Paul Buccheit being brought into the government policy loop -- along with Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman -- please rise and say, ***Hell yes!***

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Meanwhile, the rich will continue to look down on the poor, as they have always done. The rich will also continue to be more likely to lie and cheat -- in other, kinder-and-gentler words, *act unethically*

-- according to a study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The behaviors even include taking candy from children.

And, childishly, Republicans tried to put the kibosh on a report that showed -- guess what? -- cutting tax rates for the wealthiest Americans did not spur economic recovery or job growth. Who could have guessed?

Somewhere in there, *noblesse oblige* turned into *kneel and kiss my ring, and then my ass, peasants*.

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And, of course: When things go well for corporations and the rich, they are free to skim and suck up all the profits they like, from the bottom, middle, or top. But, if things should go poorly and profits become threatened, the rich are the first to howl for bailouts and support from taxpayers.

Their motto: In good times, Capitalism; in bad times, Socialism. (It's the older version of a couple other old saws -- one being *what's mine is mine and what's yours is mine*, and another, which is *I win, tails you lose* *heads*
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As a general concept, a growing divide between rich and poor is not a good thing -- especially if you are rich and are also allergic to revolutions and guillotines.

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Recent developments are enough to make any peasant want to cry and shout, *No more socialism for corporations and the absurdly rich on the backs of taxpayers!*

You know -- that's the kind of thing you might have heard bandied about during the last major revolution that took out a big chunk of the so-called elite, when the guillotines worked all through the night.

Light the torches and grab a pitchfork, I say. Before this era's major economic battles are settled and done, the rich might have one more gap to concern themselves with once more: *Th e one between the head and the neck.*

50 million poor:

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_CENSUS_POVERTY?SITE=FLTAM&SECTION=US&TEMPLATE=

One billion bucks, busted, and beyond: [http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9234013/Black Friday surpasses 1B in online sales](http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9234013/Black_Friday_surpasses_1B_in_online_sales)

Income gap widens in 45 states:

http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/income-gap-rich-poor-increases-45-states/story?id=17723892#.ULQUvK5jD3A

Dumpster diving - Spain: <http://www.npr.org/2012/11/11/164803718/to-scrape-by-the-poor-in-spain-go-dumpster-diving>

Dumpster diving ala Limbaugh: <http://crooksandliars.com/karoli/rush-limbaugh-thinks-hungry-children-should>

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The lost decade for wages:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/11/15/174797/us-workers-endure-lost-decade.html>

Buffett, making sense again:

<http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/5-obscenely-rich-people-who-should-stop-whining-about-taxes-and-listen-warren>

Numbers the rich would like to see waffled: <http://www.alternet.org/economy/ten-numbers-rich-would-fudged>

Looking down on the poor: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-20235692>

The unethical rich: http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/article/818484/new_study_finds_that_rich_people_are_more_likely_to_lie_and_cheat

Gap? What gap? <http://www.alternet.org/republicans-try-hide-study-shows-tax-cuts-rich-spur-inequality>

Today's Decadent Double Bonus - Jesus & Dubya agree, it's time to go shopping! <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/the-pope/9693576/Jesus-was-born-years-earlier-than-thought-claims-Pope.html>

After shopping, have Coffee With Jesus at Radio Free Babylon! <http://radiofreebabylon.com/Comics/CoffeeWithJesus.php>