

## Romney's Decline and Fall

One of the curious omissions by all the commentators I've heard thus far, is that Mitt Romney, by choosing Paul Ryan as the VP candidate, has insured that following Romney's defeat in the general election, Ryan will become the leader of the GOP and the almost certain GOP Presidential candidate in 2016.

In mid-July I had the odd feeling I was watching the disintegration of the Romney campaign. First, Romney was unable to deal with Obama's master stroke of lifting the threat of deportation from a large number of illegal immigrants. Obama had, with that action, secured a clear advantage with the Hispanic vote.

Second, Romney's inability to deal with the income taxes, and his confusing efforts to deal with his time at Bain (ie, he had ended his ties with Bain "retroactively"!!!), left a sense among political observers that Romney was in free fall. It wasn't, if folks remember, simply that the Democrats had made an issue of the income taxes, but that key Republicans and conservatives had joined in the chorus demanding he release more than two years of returns.

Third, most of us (including me) had not seen the media attacks Romney had made on his opponents in the primary, because those attacks were not made in the national media, but at the local and state levels. Some of those candidates self-destructed (the case with Rick Perry), or had known they had no chance of winning the nomination (as was true of Ron Paul), but Romney had waged a ruthless campaign against Gingrich, Cain, and Santorum. He had poured in money, dug up dirt, and essentially "bought" the primaries with his war chest. Primaries are always lessons in how blunt objects will be used to knock out opponents. In this case, the net result was that Romney had left behind a trail of genuine bitterness and hard feeling among the conservative candidates. It is true the "Tea Party" (and the "establishment GOP") hate Obama so much, they will support whoever is running against him, but in this case what we saw was the victory of the candidate no one really loved, and many profoundly detested. Contributing to this was the perception that Romney would take any side of any issue if it would help him to win.

The election had been Romney's to lose. With 8% unemployment, (and I am referring to long term unemployment), Obama, on the face of it, had no chance of winning. "It is the economy, stupid," to quote the slogan from Bill Clinton's campaign. Romney had done his best to make that the central issue of his campaign.

Thus I found it difficult to believe, in mid-July, that the Romney campaign was coming apart at the seams. But this was confirmed by his overseas trip, where he managed to irritate the conservative Prime Minister of England. It was therefore no surprise when, starting in the first week of August, key elements in the Republican Party (the *Wall Street Journal* and *National*

*Review*) began to push for the selection of Paul Ryan as the VP choice. The selection of Paul Ryan was almost a concession that Romney had lost the election but at least would be able to pull the base together.

In politics it is extremely risky to state any outcome as a sure thing three months in advance. Much may happen, from some tragedy involving the candidates themselves, to events in Europe, which could sink the US financial ship, to a possible Israeli attack on Iran. But as it stands now, Romney has lost. The polls of early August confirmed this - they were unanimous in showing a shift away from Romney and toward Obama, beyond the margin of error, and, most important, in the key states Romney had to win.

Romney's plight helps explain why the GOP has launched such a strong national attack on the right to vote - special credit goes to Rachel Maddow, perhaps the brightest star in the MSNBC galaxy, who has documented both the national efforts to restrict the right to vote, and the specific and outrageous effort in the key state of Ohio to make it much harder for voters in Democratic districts to have their votes counted. (Ohio is a scandal - in the Bush vs. Gore race the combination of the voter fraud in Florida and in Ohio gave the race to Bush. Voter fraud goes both ways - the Democrats have done much the same thing. But this is the first time I can remember, since the Civil Rights Act was passed, that we have seen a systematic effort to deny categories of voters easy access to the polls - this means African Americans, Hispanics, the elderly, and students).

If I'm right and the GOP is doomed to defeat in this election, the fault rests in large measure with the Tea Party which has locked Romney into positions which alienated key sectors of the voting public. Leaving aside gay voters, most of whom will go to Obama, the assault on women's rights (well covered by Maddow) has meant that even normally Republican voters have been alienated. The Black vote will, again, go overwhelmingly to Obama. The immigration issue has locked an overwhelming majority of Hispanic voters into support of Obama. Romney's visit to Israel did not split the Jewish vote, which will still go by a heavy margin to Obama.

What Romney does have is a clear majority of the white working class male voters, plus a majority of the middle class voters. (The number of upper class voters is too small to be decisive, but in any event will split). In the old days this might easily have been enough to win an election. But older white voters who depend on Medicare and Social Security will be turned off by the choice of Paul Ryan. (The addition of Ryan to the ticket may well have guaranteed that Florida will go to Obama).

With each passing year the electorate is "less white". One reason for the Tea Party is the sense of alienation felt by older white voters who are baffled by a world in which there are gays and lesbians getting married and anchoring TV news shows, and a black is in the White House. The

Tea Party is hardly a "reasoned response", and this was confirmed by those who sought its blessing, from Bachmann to Santorum.

What is disturbing about the GOP campaign this year was the range of possible candidates. We didn't have a choice of serious folks, but people like Herman Cain, Michele Bachmann, Newt Gingrich, and Rick Perry. Jon Huntsman was one of the few candidates who could be considered qualified, and he was quickly eliminated. If this had been an "off year" when the GOP stood no chance of winning, one might understand why someone such as Michele Bachmann was taken seriously. But as it stands, the range of candidates suggests the GOP has few heavy hitters. (An exception is Paul Ryan who, despite my sharp disagreements with his "Ayn Rand" economic approach, is a thoughtful man).

One personal note on Romney. It is rare that truly wealthy men or women enter politics - it is easier for them to hire a candidate. (As, if you check the record, you will find Richard Nixon was hired, long ago, by a group of businessmen in his Congressional district). There are exceptions such as Rockefeller or Bloomberg. Generally, however, the very rich do their best to avoid publicity. It is considered in bad taste to make a display of wealth. The very rich are virtually invisible. They do not ride the subways or buses; they do not fly economy class. Their children go to private schools. They lived in gated communities or in well guarded condominiums. They often have body guards.

It is not merely, as Scott Fitzgerald wrote, that "the rich are different" from the rest of us - they are, for the most part, invisible, and prefer it that way. Romney is in this category of the super-rich but he lacks something that usually goes with this category - a sense of *noblesse oblige*.

That ability to leave "lesser mortals" at ease marked FDR, John F. Kennedy, and George Bush (the senior - not the Jr.). But it is something Mitt Romney lacks. His laugh is nervous, his smile too quick, his responses too robotic. This is in part because his background in the Mormon Church already put him at a distance from most of us. Remember, as a Mormon, Romney can't have a beer, or a bourbon and branch water. Unlike JFK or Bush Sr., who saw military service and had to deal with people from a range of classes, Romney didn't share that experience.

It is my private guess that this accounted for his extraordinary fumble on the matter of taxes. I doubt there is anything illegal in the returns, rather I think Romney felt "we" simply didn't have the right to demand more than the two years he will give us. His wife, who shares his background, made the comment when pressed about the taxes that "*you people* have all you need". That "you people" was so revealing - it wasn't said in anger, but from that sense of distance that great wealth has given the Romney's.

What is missing in the debate about the deficit, and the Paul Ryan budget (which, let it be noted,

was attacked by the Catholic Bishops) is not some display of anger about exempting the wealthy – the Democrats are good at that. What is missing is any discussion of the one area where massive cuts can safely be made - the military budget. Hundreds of overseas bases will remain off limits to discussion. And on this, Obama, just as much as Paul Ryan, will be silent. (Though there have been some subtle hints that Obama may mention this in the course of the campaign). Jesus once said to his disciples "the poor you have always with you", something Paul Ryan is happy to accept. If Jesus were around today he might say "the military you have always with you".

In any event we will know very soon if I have badly misread the political scene. For myself, I will vote for the Socialist Party ticket, Stewart Alexander - and if the SP can't make the New York State ballot, I'll vote for whatever minor party does make it.