

Media promotes right-wing “tea parties”

Tom Eley
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A series of anti-tax rallies were held across the US on Wednesday, the deadline for filing federal income tax returns. The rallies were heavily promoted and well-publicized by sections of the media in order to divert along reactionary lines the growing popular anger over the government bailout of the financial industry.

Organizers claim that over 700 rallies took place nationally, drawing over 100,000 protesters. Most of the larger rallies numbered in the hundreds, according to media accounts. The largest may have taken place in Michigan, where a crowd estimated at between 3,000 and 5,000 gathered in the state capital, Lansing.

The rallies were hardly the result of a spontaneous grass roots initiative. They were largely the outcome of an orchestrated media campaign, spearheaded by Rupert Murdoch’s Fox News and reactionary radio talk show hosts. The events had the backing of some prominent Republicans, anti-tax organizations, gun rights groups and anti-immigration zealots.

Fox News and radio figures such as Rush Limbaugh assiduously promoted the events. On the morning of the rallies, the more “mainstream” network, CNN, broadcast a national map pinpointing the locations where the events would be held and advised viewers of a web site they could visit in order to find the “tea party” closest to them.

Given the national media campaign promoting the events, the resulting turnout—even taking at face value the figures presented by organizers—was limited. But this did not stop the media from lavishing attention on the rallies. This was particularly true of regional newspapers, television stations and, of course, Fox News. Fox commentator Sean Hannity even broadcast his evening show from an Atlanta tea party.

The primary aim of the rallies was to confuse mounting public anger over the bailout of Wall Street, which may now exceed \$10 trillion in loans, cash

infusions and guarantees on debt. Organizers targeted the “fiscal irresponsibility” of Obama, who has taken over the dispensation of public funds to Wall Street from his predecessor. However, the protests focused their anger on Obama’s stimulus package, which is only a small fraction of the funds doled out to the banks.

In its coverage, the *Detroit News* featured a rally held by the fascistic Southeast Michigan Volunteer Militia, which the newspaper sought to portray as the voice of oppressed workers.

The group’s leader, according to the story, “is a postman.” The article stated that “these are people boiling on the back burner, struggling to make ends meet, carrying around a knapsack of resentment for a government that they claim has taken almost everything from them and given nothing in return.”

Cyn Soldenski told the *News*, “I’ve seen a 35 percent reduction in pay. I bought a house 18 months ago. The interest rate is going to reset and I’m so far underwater I’m going to drown. We’ve got to take the stupid government and throw it out.”

Soldenski said there was no difference between Obama and Bush. “They’re all the same thing,” he said, “Corporate tools.”

Such sentiments were manipulated by the organizers into attacks on the Obama administration from the right, based on the absurd contention that Obama’s handouts to the bankers constitute “socialism,” combined with thinly veiled appeals to racism and anti-immigrant chauvinism.

In Denver, a protester held a sign that read “Our Soldiers Didn’t Fight and Die for Socialism.” In Boston, protesters held signs reading “DC: District of Communism.” In Orlando, a sign read “Socialism is not Change.”

Prominent Republicans such as Texas Governor Rick Perry, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and South

Carolina Governor Mark Sanford addressed a number of rallies. Gingrich and Sanford, along with Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal—who used his office to promote the rallies—are positioning themselves for presidential runs in 2012. In other states, such as Iowa, Minnesota and California, organizers complained that prominent Republicans stayed away.

The media promotion of the “tea parties” shows the far right’s outsized role in US politics. The term “tea party” is meant to invoke the “Boston Tea Party” of 1773, when American colonists dressed as Indians boarded a British merchant ship and tossed its payload, tea, into Boston Harbor as a protest against “taxation without representation.” The Boston Tea Party helped set the stage for the American Revolution, an immensely progressive struggle.

Wednesday’s events, in contrast, were held in the service of political reaction.



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