

# The balanced-budget amendment and the soap-opera mentality

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*In his soon-to-be-published book, The Toynbee Factor in British Grand Strategy, EIR founder Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. discussed the role of soap operas in rendering the U.S. population susceptible to such political frauds as the balanced-budget amendment, which was recently defeated in the U.S. House of Representatives. Excerpts follow.*

. . . Examine the social-psychological effect of the radio-TV “soap opera.” Innocent, if banal stuff? If we think so, we miss the political point.

The characteristic effect of the soap opera on the mind is the romanticization of smallness of intellectual outlook, of banality and pathetically neurotic behavior. The effect on the mind is, speaking metaphorically, the same result accomplished by soaking one’s brain in alum-solution. The Tourist-Syndrome pathology [is] a relatively galactic reach of human comprehension of world affairs by comparison with the results implicit in a heavy diet of soap-opera “culture.” We shall be more specific on this point.

To focus only upon those among the features common to soap operas which have the relatively greatest impact on the political-ideological corruption of our population, these few features are to be identified. The physical setting is either the interior of family homes or a non-home setting, such as a hospital, in which all the social-spatial rules bounding the behavior and interaction of the characters duplicate the soap opera’s standard treatment of social interrelations within the interior of homes. The definition and relations of the characters are those of what is called “small-group theory,” and the plot elaborated in a seemingly random way corresponding to the Tavistock doctrine of brainwashing by means of the “leaderless group,” as this latter approach is associated with the 1930s work of Bion.

The most general of the principal effects of the use of addictive viewing of soap operas is this.

In a healthily functioning society, the home is the most significant social institution in respect to the immediate development of the child’s capabilities for achievement in the real world outside the home. For all members of the family, it is a place in which to renew moral and physical strength for one’s assaults on the problems of the real world the following day.

It used to be acknowledged, and rightly so, that one of

the worst problems our society imposed upon housewives was a degree of depressing banalization associated with the victim’s sense of being imprisoned. It was also recognized that a lack of orientation toward moving continually, and happily, to one’s challenges in the real world, was a prime correlative of neurosis and worse. In other words, lack of outward-directedness within the home correlated with infantile regression. (If one left two miners snowbound through a long northern winter, one expected in the spring to discover that either both had gone mad, or one had either simply murdered or murdered and eaten the other. Small is very ugly indeed, and so was the Nazi-international-connected author of *Small is Beautiful*.)

In the soap opera, the relationship between home and real world is reversed from the healthy to the pathological. The world exists only within the “small, leaderless group” settings of the image projected to the addicted viewer. This is purely and simply brainwashing in every clinical sense of that term. The effect of such withdrawal from the outer, real world is literally schizophrenic.

In the early phase, Tavistockian principles of mass-brainwashing developed during the 1930s were employed to provide the trapped housewife and her daughter, by means of several daily hours of successive, 15-minute radio broadcasts, some assistance in creating a fantasy life, imagining she were happily part of a different family than the one she shared with her husband or the home in which she had grown up. Her daughter indulged in fantasies of adolescent courtship-relationships and dreams of the family she would become housewife of in time to come. Through heavy conditioning, this “entertainment” induced subtly, but effectively shifts in values within a large part of the population.

The immediate general effect of shifting a sense of reality from the real world into ever-narrower circles converging on the interior of the walls of the house or apartment, is to mystify the real world, and so make the problems of the real world relatively more frightening to the victim. This generates what is to be defined quite literally as a condition of dependency upon the soap opera, and associated acting-out of soap opera-like fantasy-life, a form of addiction.

Not *political*, one argues? Very much to the contrary, it is the essence of the political process within the electorate which is shaped by such methods.

First, the general effect is infantile regression in the mental life of the addicted viewer. This correlates with not only a fear of any change in the outside world which might effect the home, but a growing unwillingness to recognize such changes as they occur. Second, the persons and objects of the real world, except as they are members also of the artifacts and persons within the range of soap opera fantasy-versions of personal life, lose the quality of sensuous reality. Like the physician, lawyer, or so forth within the soap opera as such, what he or she is in the real world is merely what he is reputed to be within the non-real world of the soap-opera setting. What the television screen, the household's daily newspaper, or the visiting gossip say to be the significance and value of objects and persons in the real world, becomes for the victim of psychological conditioning by soap opera the values which the victim will attribute to those objects and persons in real practice.

The political behavior of the electorate is changed to reflect this kind of brainwashing-effect, this behavioral modification.

Two kinds of examples suffice to illustrate that very specific kinds of modifications of political behavior of the electorate are induced by soap opera and related approaches to mass-brainwashing of the population.

First, during recent years, a sustained campaign was conducted throughout the nation, seeking rather successfully to condition the population into monetarist-doctrinal views by means of the simple fraud of saying to housewives, among others, that the administration of governmental fiscal and monetary policies could be more or less completely explained by comparing the U.S. federal budget and money-supply management to the housewife's management of a household budget. Either the promoters of this particular hoax were utterly ignorant of the ABCs of economics or they were simply hoaxsters; there is no similarity between a private household's budgetary problems and the budgetary, credit, and monetary processes of our federal government.

The household budget is based on assumption of a fixed income and fixed array of categories of needs. These needs have ranges of prices which are not controllable to any significant degree by any willful action of the members of the family. The object is not only to keep the sum of such necessary expenditures below the level of relatively fixed income, but to squeeze out some margin of saving and perhaps the proverbial "a few other little things," such as a family dining-out and a night or two during the month at a movie or something else of that general sort.

In the case of war, does a nation say to itself, we can not afford to equip and deploy an adequate military capability, merely because that would unbalance the budget? Does a nation say, "Well, I guess our commanders will just have to learn to win the war with a lot less. We can't let the fact that our enemy has twice the forces and better equipment, intimidate us into unbalancing our budget?"

Does a nation say, "If any of our pensioners starve as a

result of our efforts to balance the budget, that would be terrible. I hope our pensioners show the self-reliance to survive without their pensions."

Those things ought to be immediately obvious. There is another, more fundamental sort of difference to be considered.

The principal function of the debt of the federal government is not to cover deficits in "household accounts." Taxes must accomplish that. The business of government is to keep the level of production and circulation of agricultural and industrial goods sufficiently high that items of governmental expense can be covered by taxation without damaging the economy.

This growth of the economy is accomplished by two forms of governmental indebtedness. The preferred of the two forms is the printing and issuing of Treasury currency-notes, which the Treasury then lends through the national banking system to provide sufficient volumes of low-cost credit to ensure high rates of investment in the expansion and improvement of the production and circulation of, principally, agricultural and industrial goods. However, if the required investment-goods can not be produced within the national economy, and if we lack a surplus in our balance-of-payments accounts, we must borrow funds to be used through national banking system lending, to enable our farmers and industries to buy abroad.

The credit-creating monetary function of the federal government, or, alternatively the federal debt used in place of new issues of lendable currency-notes, is the key variable of government's fiscal and monetary responsibilities. This involves a constitutional provision (Article 1, Section 8) which no housewife is permitted (or would be able) to invade.

In summary of this specific point, the most characteristic features of federal fiscal and monetary policy are elements which have no reflection in the functions of the family household budget. If we were to impose the supposed principles of the balanced household budget to federal fiscal and monetary policy of practice, our national economy would collapse.

The behaviorally modified portion of the population rejects such information out of hand. On what premises do they reject such elementary and important facts concerning the real world? They reject the truth of the matter because the truth involves a matter which exists *only in the real world*. It is a real world they have largely rejected, whose very claims to exist they view as suspicious, and which they wish would disappear, to leave their homes and families free of its intrusions. "What I know," the angered proponent of the balanced-budget constitutional amendment glowers menacingly, "is that the government is taking too much of my family income in taxes, and that I can't stand any more inflation. I'm not interested in hearing anything you have to say, if you're trying to sell me on not demanding a 100 percent balanced federal budget."

Where was such strange and destructive political behavior acquired? In significant part through the behavioral-modification effects of soap opera.