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By Dana Milbank
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I stopped by Freedom Plaza on Tax Day to check on the progress of the nation's populist revolt.

On the stage, I saw the great populist leader himself: Grover Norquist, who, after getting two Harvard degrees, developed his common-touch lobbying for the tropical island paradise of the Seychelles. Norquist spoke from a lectern bearing a Tea Party emblem and a simple message: "The people speak."

And which people might those be? The people of the Seychelles tourist industry? Or the people of British Petroleum, Fannie Mae, the Distilled Spirits Council and the Interactive Gaming Council? Norquist represented them all, according to the [Center for Responsive Politics](#).

If Norquist isn't convincing as man of the people, that's all right, because the Tea Party has its share of faux populists. They march under slogans such as "can you hear us now?" and "we the people," but their demands on Tax Day were more those of the angry affluent than oppressed commoners.

One of Norquist's rallying cries to the crowd summed it up nicely: "Leave our earnings alone!"

A [CBS News/New York Times poll](#) released on Tax Day found that Tea Party activists are wealthier than average (20 percent of their households earn more than \$100,000, compared with 14 percent of the general population) and better educated (37 percent have college or postgraduate degrees vs. 25 percent of Americans).

This is in line with a [USA Today/Gallup poll](#) last month that found 55 percent of Tea Party supporters had incomes of \$50,000 or more (compared with 50 percent in the general population), and only 19 percent had earnings below \$30,000 (vs. 25 percent overall).

The wealth advantage of the Tea Partiers helps to explain the rather un-populist message emanating from Freedom Plaza: Tax the wealthy less and the poor more.

"We found out that we're about to have 47 percent of Americans not helping on Tax Day," Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-Tex.) told the crowd, referring to households that pay no federal income tax, generally because their incomes are too low. Gohmert, in an apparent criticism of tax credits for the working poor, objected to giving "a rebate to people who didn't put any 'bate' in."

Democrats had their own bout of pseudo-populism last week, but theirs involved a replacement for retiring Justice John Paul Stevens on the Supreme Court. My colleagues Shailagh Murray and Paul Kane on Tuesday wrote a story headlined: "[Senate Democrats' wish list for high court: Someone with non-Ivy background](#)."

They mentioned a favorite of Sens. Jon Tester and Max Baucus, both Montana Democrats: Judge Sidney R. Thomas, a product of Montana State University and the University of Montana Law School. "I can tell you, Sid Thomas is not elite," vouched Tester. Baucus lamented the large number of "Harvard grads and Eastern elites" on the court.

But the Supreme Court is precisely the place where having an "elite" legal mind is still an asset -- ask Harriet Miers. No doubt there are qualified candidates from lesser schools, and there's something to be said for judges with real-world experience. But do Democrats really want to disqualify people from the Supreme Court simply because they went to top schools? If so, they could guarantee diversity of intellect by nominating Joe the Plumber.

Alas, these lean times encourage elites of all ideologies to masquerade as populists. Fox News's Glenn Beck, a spiritual leader of the Tea Party movement, divides the nation into "the politicians and the elites who don't have the will to do the right thing or even tell you the truth, and then, the rest of us, the rank-and-file."

Yep, that's rank-and-file Beck, who, [according to Forbes magazine](#), brings in \$32 million a year.

I saw a similar contradiction on Tax Day. At a kick-off news conference, Tea Party Express leader Mark Williams, reading from his laptop (decorated with President Obama in whiteface as the Joker) declared it time to "end the abuse of the working people." He was followed by Sharron Angle, who is trying to unseat Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. "I'm running for the people's seat in Nevada," she said.

But in Freedom Plaza, the messages on signs (other than those calling Obama a socialist and a traitor) were from a particular type of people, an aggrieved elite: "Stop the war on success" and "Do you think I'm made of money?" When one speaker, radio host Neal Boortz, mentioned the "47 percent of the people in this country [who] don't pay any federal income taxes," the crowd gave a healthy boo.

These populists are clearly in the upper 53 percent.

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