

YET MORE PROOF BIG BUSINESS IS UNAMERICAN

The WaPo notes with some curiosity that the business community did almost nothing to get the debt ceiling passed. It's a remarkable story: perhaps unintentionally noting that while our banana republic status was being confirmed, the Chamber of Commerce was lobbying not to prevent that, but to get a Panama trade deal; describing a betrayed Third Way executive pissed that business had not done more; describing two centrist Dems and Obama's Chief of Staff imploring the business community to do more.

With the U.S. government on the verge of a historic default, the country's largest business lobbying group took to the halls of Congress last week to press lawmakers to support the Panama Free-Trade Agreement.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce sponsored a "door knock," with 80 members handing out Panama hats to tout a trade deal with a country that has a smaller economy than Akron, Ohio. To critics, the Chamber event illustrates what has been a deafening silence from U.S. executive suites on the gridlock in Washington over raising the country's \$14.3 trillion debt ceiling.

"They haven't done nearly enough to sound the alarm," said Jim Kessler, vice president for policy at Third Way, a Washington research group that describes itself as advocating "moderate policy" and has executives from Morgan Stanley (MS) and Goldman Sachs Group Inc. (GS) on its board. Executives "think this is all Washington theater, and it will all get done in the end."

[snip]

At a closed-door meeting with Chamber lobbyist Bruce Josten last month, Democratic Senators Mark Begich of Alaska and Mark Warner of Virginia upbraided the group and its member companies for not twisting arms hard enough to get a compromise package worked out, according to two people familiar with the discussion whospoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting was private.

[snip]

“It’s unfortunate that the business interests have not stepped forward as loudly as they should have,” Bill Daley, the White House chief of staff, said in an interview with Bloomberg Television July 26. “You’ve had a silence from the business community to the political establishment over the last number of years that’s been unfortunate.”

The article later offers the opinion of just one business professor, which attributed the inaction of businessmen to embarrassment that their party, the Republicans, were doing what they were doing, to explain the business community’s inaction on the debt ceiling.

“They’re caught,” [business professor Warren] Bennis said in an interview July 29. “They tend to be Republican and they are embarrassed by what they see from Republicans,” Bennis said. “It’s a real stalemate and CEOs want to stay clear of it.”

Yet nowhere does the article—or people like Kessler, Begich, Warner, or Daley—consider the possibility that the business community got just what it wanted with this debt fiasco. They never consider the possibility that the business community might be thrilled with inane cuts to the federal government—probably,

ultimately, targeted at the social safety net. They never consider the possibility that the business community might benefit from the chaos and uncertainty that this debate generated. They never consider the possibility that the business community might like how this legislative fight made our country even more of a banana republic.

I'd suggest it's worth considering more seriously. After all, the business community has embraced (you could say, returned to) a model that relies on the insecurity of workers to demand compliance and cheap labor. The cuts this deal will ultimately bring about add to worker insecurity.

And just as importantly, most of these multinationals don't much care for the US, except insofar as it has a big military to defend "US" business interests overseas. The ones describes that did lobby for a debt ceiling—banksters like JP Morgan or health care companies like Blue Cross or Pfizer—have been beneficiaries of big help from the federal government in recent years. They're not done looting it yet! But the others are multinational companies; the US is just a convenient place to incorporate.

Moreover, businesses have been pushing an ideology for the last 30 years that the government is dysfunctional and therefore society must cede more control to businesses. Even as businessmen like Rick Snyder and Rick Scott prove failures at governance, the follies in DC still, at least, provide evidence that government is worse.

Of course these businessmen didn't lobby for a reasonable solution to this false crisis. They liked the false crisis.