

North Carolina Republicans steal citizens' rights, citizens rally to fight back

Over the course of a summer, North Carolina went from shining example of the New South to laughingstock of the nation.

Spearheaded by the election of Governor Pat McCrory, Republicans consolidated control of the state government in 2012. They wasted little time consummating their neoconservative wet dreams by decreasing welfare benefits, demolishing conservation acts, denouncing Medicaid, degrading women's reproductive rights, devaluing our education budget and — perhaps most damnable — denying voters' rights to a tremendous number of North Carolinians, mainly minorities, the elderly and students.

Simultaneously, they cut taxes for corporations and the wealthy, granted raises to cabinet members and rewarded exorbitant salaries to campaign staffers in the style of classic cronyism.

Over the course of the summer, I fumed to myself, "Does no one witness the injustice committed in our state?"

Thankfully, I was not alone.

Beginning in Raleigh this spring, Moral Monday demonstrations sprouted across the state from Wilmington to Asheville, and coverage of the movement has appeared in the pages of national and international publications such as The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times and The Economist.

The movement resembles a counter-Tea Party, both in its opposition to Republican legislators and its motley crew of egalitarian activists.

"It's a very eclectic group of people," said Davia Young, first-year and Moral Monday protestor.

"It's not just liberals or just certain types of people. It's a huge mix because there are so many issues that have been brought up."

Moral Mondays unite many people for various reasons, but all unite against the status quo in Raleigh.

"(Moral Monday protestors) won't accept a government only for the white, only for the rich, only for the straight, only for the male, only for the Christian," said Professor of Law Gene Nichol, Moral Monday protestor and director of the Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity at UNC-Chapel Hill, in an email to The Guilfordian. "But right now, that's the government we have."

Sadly, perhaps unsurprisingly, "the government we have" remains unmoved by the demonstrations.

"(Republican policymakers) didn't care that so many of their constituents were upset at them," said Tim Leisman '13, another Moral Monday protestor. "They didn't change their extremist agenda at all to reflect the opinion of the state."

Governor McCrory exemplified GOP obstinacy when, instead of opening dialogue with activists, he hand-delivered a plate of cookies to women outside the governor's mansion protesting the closure of abortion clinics — a condescending gesture reeking of the sentiment, "Let them eat cake."

In revolutionary style, over 900 protestors have been arrested for refusal to disperse from the General Assembly. However, attendees consider detainment a badge of pride.

"One of the Moral Mondays was on my 18th birthday," said Young. "The only present I asked for was permission from my parents to be arrested."

Though overnight jailing principally symbolizes the commitment of Moral Monday protestors, the hopeful secondary effect seems obvious: to spur North Carolinians' attention in order to oust the GOP from the government in the next election.

The prospect seems feasible. Democratic candidates received 51 percent of votes in the last election and, according to a Sept. 12 release from Public Policy Polling, 54 percent of North Carolina voters strongly disapprove of complete Republican control of the state.



One participant in a Moral Monday demonstration protests legislation that restricts women's reproductive rights. Demonstrators have protested many changes made by the Republican majority.

However, stealthy redistricting installed by the Republican-led 2010 Senate — gerrymandering former Democratic Governor Bev Perdue was unable to veto — secured the ace in the hole for Republicans in this past election. Along with voter suppression, district lines may prove what NC Policy Watch called "(the Republican)

insurance policy."

Whether or not the Moral Monday protests can overcome the strife imposed by reactionaries in the General Assembly has yet to be seen. The effect of the movement can only be realized next year, when voters take to the polls to decide whether or not they wish to be represented — or repressed.

Standardizing pay for servers: tips aren't an income

Would you rather make \$2.13 an hour or \$16.37?

The answer seems obvious, but there is still much debate in America's service industry. The United States maintains low standards of hourly pay for service workers.

Across North Carolina, servers make a base pay of only \$2.13 an hour and survive off of tips alone.

Working in restaurants is something I firmly believe everyone should have to do at least once, because trying to survive off tips alone is no easy task. In my stint as a waitress, I would work for two weeks, only bring home \$50 on paychecks and try to pay bills with the tips.

When dirty diapers are left for tips — which happened to me not once, but twice — decent wages are preferred. I cannot put gas in my car with dirty diapers.

Primarily, this issue affects servers who work mostly carry-out restaurants or restaurants with low business turnout. The fluctuating income servers face in this industry makes money management difficult and nearly impossible at times.

The chance to improve credit is a problem for servers working for tips.

"It's very difficult to be accepted for a loan, because when they see you're a waitress, they consider your income too inconsistent since you're working for tips," said Gail Thigpin, waitress-turned-manager of The Pioneer Family Restaurant in Archdale, N.C.

Assistant Professor of Economics Natalya Shelkova agrees that a wage-based salary benefits servers.

"In Germany, the waiting staff is paid very well," said Shelkova. "The waiting staff can be different ages, not only young people; it can be a career for a person."

However, there is counter argument to wage-based pay. Mike Liner, owner of The Pioneer Family Restaurant, prefers paying his staff the \$2.13 minimum wage.

"When the wait staff works harder they receive more tips, but it also makes customers come back, which benefits everyone," said Liner.

Shelkova believes the U.S. may be slow to catching up with the rest of the world in server wages.

"The U.S. has its own ways," said Shelkova. "Tips are performance-based ... there is a productivity argument to it."

However, I have worked in restaurants for nearly 10 years, and I have noticed it does not matter how hard a server works. Some people are not going to tip — or worse, leave dirty diapers on your table.

Depending on customers for an income is hard, and it

honestly does not always matter how friendly the server is. Many people have decided their tip before they walk through the door.

However, there is a solution to this problem.

Since tip-based jobs cannot provide a stable source of income, responsibility for paying the staff should go directly to the owner of the restaurant.

The system works this way in many other countries. For example, Australia's minimum weekly rate is \$622.20 for a regular 38-hour week, and in Canada the general minimum wage is \$10.25 an hour, providing security and consistency for workers.

Paying a non-tipped minimum wage eases the burden, especially for servers working in restaurants underperforming in dine-in sales.

According to Sandra Smithers, a veteran waitress, this works in other restaurants.

"When I worked at East Coast Wings I was paid minimum wage plus tips," Smithers said.

This provides a fallback for servers so they do not have to depend completely on tips alone.

While I really do enjoy restaurant work for the most part, the inconsistent income needs to be revamped. Perhaps one day we will catch up with the rest of the world by standardizing pay for servers.



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