

Obama is Still Shopping for a “Grand Bargain”

By [Shamus Cooke](#)

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President Obama’s recent closed-door sessions with Republican congressmen to reach a “grand bargain” has roused suspiciously little attention in the mainstream media. What scant reporting has occurred presents the following narrative: President Obama is a “middle ground” politician attempting to breach political divides with erstwhile Republican opponents. In reality these meetings are not between political opposites, but kindred spirits; perfectly matched ideologies that differ only in implementation, and only by degrees.

Here’s a summary of the meetings by the Conservative [Economist magazine](#):

“On March 6th he [Obama] took 12 Republican senators out to dinner at a posh hotel in Washington... The [Republican] guests noted with surprise and delight that he [Obama] listened more than he talked...The next day Mr. Obama invited [Republican] Paul Ryan to lunch at the White House...This week he is paying three visits to Congress on three consecutive days, to make his pitch for a grand bargain to each party’s caucus in both chambers.”

The article fails to remind us what the definition of a “Grand Bargain” is, nor its political/historical significance. Essentially the Grand Bargain is a bi-partisan plan that does two things: 1) reduces the national deficit by cutting so-called “entitlement programs” (Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, education, etc.) and 2) raises revenue via taxation (not necessarily from the wealthy and corporations).

Does this make Obama a treacherous renegade of the Democratic Party? Not quite.

Many Democrats are leading the attack on popular “entitlement” programs erected under Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal (Social Security) and enhanced by Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programs (Medicare). These are the bedrock social programs of the modern Democratic Party. But even bedrock turns into quicksand over time. The Democrats of today have been radically transformed, thanks to a monsoon of corporate cash that has eroded the parties affiliation to its past.

The corporate Democrats in the Senate have been so complicit in the Grand Bargaining that the pro-Democrat New York Times recently congratulated them for putting forth their own proposed budget, in an attempt to separate them from the political fallout that would come if a Grand Bargain actually came to fruition. [The New York Times reports:](#)

“It’s been four years since the Democrats who control the Senate produced a budget. That has meant four missed opportunities to demonstrate what they stand for, in hard numbers and clear spending priorities. On Wednesday, the chamber’s leaders stiffened their spines and issued a 2014 budget.”

In reality it’s not about stiff spines but saved faces. This Grand Bargain conversation has been happening in the media since Obama was elected in 2008, and only now, when the chapter’s final paragraph is being written, do Senate Democrats put forward an alternative ending they know won’t pass.

But what about the progressive caucus Democrats in the House of Representatives? They too are complicit in the crimes of the corporate Blue Dog Democrats. For example, you would be hard pressed to find even the most progressive Democrat publicly denounce Obama's scheming to cut Social Security and Medicare; instead, these progressive Democrats spend their time pointing out the obvious — that Republicans would like to cut these popular programs.

This type of distraction provides vital political cover for Obama to continue his right wing policies. The progressive caucus thus minimizes or ignores the sins of its leadership, guaranteeing that the rightward drift of the Democrats will continue.

It's true that the progressive caucus released a progressive budget as an alternative to the Republican's — and Obama's — budget. But this budget has no chance of being passed, and progressive caucus Democrats have no intention of building a movement that might give life to such a budget, since it would make their leadership look bad and divide their party.

At the end of the day the progressive Democrats will fall in line with the Democratic leadership, as they typically do. If Obama needs the votes, the progressives will cough them up. One of the first "progressive" Democrats to jump on the Grand Bargain bandwagon is Congressman Sheldon Whitehouse, who, in speaking about the President's Grand Bargain hunting [said](#):

"We will have your [Obama's] back, you will have ours, together we will give President Obama all the support he needs during these [Grand Bargain] negotiations."

This progressive caucus complicity was also [noted recently by Norman Solomon](#), (a longtime associate of the media watch group Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting) who noticed that curiously little progressive caucus members had signed onto a letter that pledged to vote against any budget that included cuts to Social Security and Medicare. The political winds have shifted to the right, and the progressives would like to stay Democrats, which now means supporting cuts to Social Security and Medicare.

This wouldn't be a surprise to anyone who had read the [recent article by John Stauber](#), who traced the origins of the "Progressive Movement," which was set up by the rich Democrats who lead the party, as a way to counteract the Republicans media savvy. The point of the Progressive Movement and progressive Democrats is not to change society, but to beat Republicans in elections by creating the appearance of a groundswell of support for Democratic Party policies.

At the end of the day a so-called progressive Democrat is still a Democrat, and the Democratic Party has re-made its image to reflect the interests of its new big donors from Wall Street, who now feel as comfortable buying Democrats as they do purchasing a Republican politician.

Both Republicans and Democrats know that a Grand Bargain comes with gigantic political risks, most notably political suicide, since the party that cuts Social Security and Medicare will earn the hatred of 99% of Americans. Their ingenious answer is to blame each other. The progressive Democrats and Tea Party Republicans who stand on the sidelines during this fiasco — without taking any real action to stop it — stand to benefit from the outcome, and will loudly denounce the treachery post-treachery, their own names remaining unbesmirched.

But the majority of people in the U.S. will see through such blatant opportunism, and will trust neither party again. The far right will thus rush to organize a new political party, while the labor and community groups supporting the Democrats will either do the same or continue hitching their fortunes to a flagship sinking to the bottom of the ocean.

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Notes

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