

Trillion Dollar Hair Splitting: The Fake Budget Debate in Washington, D.C.

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Global Research, April 22, 2011

22 April 2011

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

By definition, a “debate” requires two opposing sides holding mutually exclusive opinions. In the U.S. Congress, however, real debate has all but vanished. Instead, we are subjected to endless blather that — if you listen closely — is a simple discussion over splitting hairs.

There can be no U.S. budget debate when both sides have already agreed that massive cuts to social programs — including Medicare and Social Security — will be the foundation of any plan.

With this fundamental agreement already in place, Democrats and Republicans are pathetically trying to create a division where none exists. The right wing looks especially foolish, since Obama has been furiously sprinting to the political right throughout the budget “debate,” having already overtaken the right-wing deficit hawks; in response, the hawks have gotten more hawkish and restarted their rightward dash in a desperate attempt to appear in “opposition” to the right-wing President.

For example, the Republicans originally demanded that an astonishing \$4 trillion be cut from the U.S. budget, mainly through cuts to social programs. Not to be outdone, Obama presented a plan that would cut \$4 trillion, mainly through cuts to social programs. The furthest right are the so-called Tea Party Republicans, who want to cut \$10 trillion by essentially privatizing the entire U.S. Government.

But, back to the hair splitting. Obama calls the \$4 trillion Republican plan “radical,” and he’s right; the plan seeks to privatize Medicare, destroy Medicaid, gut other social programs, lower corporate tax rates, etc.

Read Shamus Cooke’s chapter in *“The Global Economic Crisis”*

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But Obama is a radical budget cutter too; he seeks to gut Medicare/Medicaid by \$480 billion(!), slash spending for many crucial programs for the poor, and privatize public education through his corporate-sponsored Race to the Top program.

Obama is trying to make his plan seem progressive by talking about “taxing the rich,” but this is a lie. Finally allowing the Bush-era tax cuts to expire is not “taxing the rich” (Bush himself planned for the cuts to have expired already, but Obama agreed to extend them.)

Obama’s recent tough speech against the Republicans was the first sign of life for the President, just in time for him to begin his presidential run for 2012, which will surely be full of promises that will never see the light of day.

As the President wages a “battle” over secondary budget issues, such as how best to make \$4 trillion in cuts, the main issues are already agreed upon. Economist Richard Reich helps explain:

“...the Democratic leadership in Congress refuse to refute the Republicans’ big lie — that spending cuts will lead to more jobs. In fact, spending cuts now will lead to fewer jobs. They’ll slow down an already-anemic recovery. That will cause immense and unnecessary suffering for millions of Americans”

“The president continues to legitimize the Republican claim that too much government spending caused the economy to tank, and that by cutting back spending we’ll get the economy going again.” (April 10, 2011).

This two-party big lie is not an accident, but an expression of a deeper held belief: that the U.S. government must be directed to meet the needs of the super wealthy who own U.S. corporations. Holding this belief requires that you gut social programs (since corporations hate paying taxes) and privatize everything publicly owned (so corporations can own them for profit).

As long as both Democrats and Republicans agree to these deeper beliefs, the country will shift continually to the right, with social programs and living standards evaporating. However, the stronger that labor and community groups unite and fight to save these social programs, the harder will it be to cut them; out of such a struggle will emerge practical solutions to solving the deficit problems of the country, such as dramatically increasing the taxes on the rich and corporations so that jobs can be created and social programs saved.

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http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-reich/post_1927_b_847279.html

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