

Deficit Reduction Versus Democracy

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Listening to Congress debate deficit deduction is like listening to a den of lions discuss the welfare of zebras. In both cases the debate is very one-sided. Democrats and Republicans sound disagreeable on TV, but their arguments differ by the tiniest of degrees (like lions fighting over how best to eat a zebra.)

The zebras in this case are U.S. working people, who are not seeing their interests represented by their so-called representatives. Instead of fixing the national deficit in the way that the vast majority of Americans would like, only the opinions of a tiny minority of very rich people are being considered. Both political parties are uniting to reduce the deficits on the backs of working people.

For example, Obama's chief of staff, William Daley, spoke recently about the budget deficit and the need for massive cuts to social programs, which include Social Security and Medicare:

"Everyone [Democrats and Republicans] agrees that a number around \$4 trillion [in cuts] is the number that will make a serious dent in our deficit...He [Obama] didn't come to this town to do little things. He came to do big things." (July 10th, 2011).

In a recent presidential address Obama said: "Government has to start living within its means, just like families do. We have to cut the spending we can't afford so we can put the economy on sounder footing, and give our businesses the confidence they need to grow and create jobs."

This is the language of the right wing, which is now the language of both the Democrat and Republican parties. In reality, the U.S. government could easily access trillions of dollars in revenue; it simply chooses not to. Both political parties refuse to discuss how raising taxes on the wealthy and corporations could easily fix the current deficit issue on both the federal and state levels. The ONLY mention of taxing the rich is in the context of the Bush tax cuts, which some Democrats would allow to expire in the coming year; but it's very possible that Democrats will "compromise" on this issue yet again.

Even economist and liberal Obama-backer Paul Krugman put two and two together when he said:

"in fact, if all you did was listen to his [Obama's] speeches, you might conclude that he basically shares the GOP's diagnosis of what ails our economy and what should be done to fix it." (July 8th, 2011).

The rich and corporations have always hated Social Security and Medicare; they'd rather not

pay taxes towards these programs at all. It lowers their profits. And ONLY this perspective is being shared on the mainstream media and being discussed in the halls of Congress. If massive cuts are made to these federal programs at the expense of millions of working people — without substantially raising taxes on the wealthy — then the safety net in the U.S. will have been critically injured.

How would the vast majority of working people in this country like the deficit to be fixed? Poll after poll has indicated that cutting Social Security and Medicare is VERY unpopular, while raising taxes on the wealthy is extremely popular. A recent Washington Post/ABC News poll reported that 78 percent of Americans are opposed to cuts in Medicare, while 72 percent favor taxing the rich. (April 20th, 2011).

But polls are just one way of expressing popular opinion, i.e. democracy. Another alternative is massive street mobilizations. In Greece the majority of people have exposed the anti-democratic policies of their government, which is trying to impose massive cuts to social programs to fix Greece's budget problems. Sound familiar? If the Greek government doesn't change course it will have zero popular backing, i.e., it will be a dictatorship. Obama's silence on this situation in Greece is very telling.

In order to follow the Greek and Wisconsin examples of massive mobilizations, there must be an organizational push within working class organizations to make it happen. A resolution adopted unanimously by the Executive Committee of San Francisco Labor Council on July 5, 2011 expresses this vision:

"The big question now is what the labor movement will do to meet this challenge confronting working people and the great majority. The choice is clear: either confine labor's protest against cuts in the social programs to pronouncements opposing them, coupled with lobbying; or combine these efforts with an all-out mobilization of the rank-and-file and our allies to prevent the cuts from being enacted."

The San Francisco Labor Council resolution also encouraged all sectors of labor to organize "a campaign to mobilize support for "No Cuts or Concessions! Tax the Corporations and the Rich!" in the streets — where it counts the most — and in every corner of the nation."

Democracy is no longer expressed in the halls of Congress nor in the White House and must therefore be transferred to the streets.

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