

How President Obama Created Paul Ryan

By [Shamus Cooke](#)

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Paul Ryan is suddenly a household name after becoming Mitt Romney's vice presidential running mate. Before that, Ryan had only become right-wing leadership material in the last year, based on his proposed national budget that hacks away at the core of many national social programs, including Medicare.

No one deserves more credit for Ryan's rapid rise into stardom than President Obama, who opened heavy political doors for the aspiring Republican vice president, none more weighty than that Pandora's box of "entitlement reform" — cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and other social programs.

Destroying these programs has been on the Republicans agenda forever; however, for decades there has not existed an environment to implement them — political suicide would've been the result.

For example, the Republican Eisenhower and Nixon presidencies make the modern Democratic party look like right-wing Republicans: Eisenhower taxed the wealthy at 90 percent; Nixon over 70 percent, both never dared discuss cutting either Social Security or Medicare in public.

Now it seems that anything is possible.

But it was the Obama Administration that started the "yes we can" motto to cutting Social Security and Medicare. Although Bush Jr. had similar ambitions, he froze in the face of massive opposition. Obama has obliterated this opposition, akin to his predator drones dismembering a Pakistani funeral.

Although it's rarely discussed in the so-called liberal press, Obama has worked to undermine Social Security and Medicare since he became President. His proposed national budget would have made a Republican blush only four years ago, and only looks "progressive" when compared to Ryan's travesty of a budget. Both demand condemnation. Let the pro-Obama camp debate the "lesser/greater evil inherent in the two budgets" (one could also debate the competing virtues in two piles of feces).

Obama's budget planned to cut \$3 trillion from the national budget in ten years. The New York Times explains:

"The proposal also includes \$580 billion in adjustments [cuts] to health and entitlement programs, including \$248 billion to Medicare and \$72 billion to Medicaid."

That leaves \$260 billion in cuts to other yet-to-be-named social programs.

Social Security has also been on Obama's chopping block since 2008. For example, Obama had been working with Republicans behind closed doors to work out a so-called "Grand Bargain" deal that aimed to make cuts to Social Security and Medicare. An interesting article in the Washington Post explains:

"...the major elements of a [Grand] bargain seemed to be falling into place: \$1.2 trillion in [national programs] agency cuts, smaller cost-of-living increases for Social Security recipients [cuts by dollar inflation], nearly \$250 billion in Medicare savings [cuts] achieved in part by raising the eligibility age. And \$800 billion in new taxes."

After the Grand Bargain failed (barely), Obama came to rely on his prior political creation: the bi-partisan deficit reduction committee, which he tasked to shred the social safety net. To ensure the job was done right he appointed the most right-wing Democrats possible.

The committee created "trigger cuts" which will conveniently go into effect after the November 2012 election, assuming that no new budget deal goes into effect. The cuts will destroy at least \$50 billion a year in non-military domestic spending programs, until 2021.

Obama's drive to cut these cherished programs has been fanatical; it's safe to say that he's worked on nothing harder during the last four years of his presidency. It was this carefully crafted environment that nurtured Paul Ryan, who sought to make a name for himself by out right-winging the right-wing Democratic President. Ryan had to aim high and far right, since the President had veered wildly to the right past most of Ryan's Republican colleagues.

Now Paul Ryan is the subject of a frontal assault from the Democratic Party and its allies; but this is play fighting amongst corporate-bought hypocrites who mostly agree. Working people shouldn't choose sides in this corporate yelling match, no matter how lesser the evil one side may seem.

Obama is doing his best to lure working people back into his campaign camp by proposing to "tax the rich" to help fund his deficit reduction plan (while still cutting massive social programs!). But Obama made this same promise the last time he campaigned. He then extended the Bush tax cuts, which would have expired by themselves had he not intervened. New election, same promise.

To really tax the rich Obama would have to show a little audacity for once. If Obama actually fought to remove the Bush tax cuts, the richest 1% would see their income taxes raised 3 percentage points, to 38 percent.

This baby step is more of a distraction than a solution. Some progressives act as if this promise of Obama's — which means absolutely nothing — would be the greatest achievement for working people since civil rights.

In reality, a much greater demand for increased taxes on the wealthy and corporations is needed. Labor and community groups need to independently put forward their own demands to tax the rich and corporations to prevent ALL cuts to social programs. Otherwise, the "solutions" offered by the Democrats will continue to be aligned with the Republicans, at the expense of working people, and the inequalities in wealth will continue to grow. Labor and community groups have been quiet about the coming post-election austerity "trigger" budget cuts to social programs in an effort to give Obama much needed political cover.

Instead, these groups would serve their members better by uniting in massive mobilizations nationally to demand “no cuts” to social programs.

Shamus Cooke is a social service worker, trade unionist, and writer for Workers Action (www.workerscompass.org) He can be reached at shamuscooke@gmail.com

Notes

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/afghanistan-pakistan/secret-war/new-study-asserts-drone-strikes-in-pakistan-target-rescuers-funerals/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/19/us/politics/obama-plan-to-cut-deficit-will-trim-spending.html>

http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obamas-evolution-behind-the-failed-grand-bargain-on-the-debt/2012/03/15/gIQAHyfjS_story.html

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