

Ideological Manipulation: Attacking Progressive Ideas and Policies, Misrepresenting Socialism

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Capitalist ideology apparatuses (i.e. talk shows, cable news, think tanks, business press editorialists, etc.) have been gearing up in recent months, targeting new progressive ideas that have begun to emerge: medicare for all, modern money theory, green new deal, Socialism, etc. Ideology defined here refers to purposeful manipulation and distortion of ideas in defense of the economic interests of dominate elites and classes.

This ideological manipulation, which aims at misrepresentation and distortion of original ideas, is based on various techniques of language transformation. One such technique is to *delete* reference to essential propositions that are part of the original idea; to *add contradictory propositions* to further distort the original idea; to *invert the logic* and relationships of elements in the idea; to *reverse the causal* relationships between the elements; to *substitute correlations for causation*, etc. (For more detail on the methodology see my various blog pieces at [jackrasmus.com](#) on how ideology works in economics, as well as my forthcoming book, 'The Scourge of Neoliberalism', Clarity Press, September 2019).

Ideological manipulation is not new. A number of such notions lie at the heart of Neoliberalism. Among Neoliberalism's most notable examples are nonsense like 'free trade benefits all', 'business tax cuts create jobs', 'inflation is always due to too much money chasing too few goods', 'markets are always efficient' (and the corollary, government is always inefficient); 'productivity determines wage gains', 'central banks are independent'; 'recessions are caused only by 'external' shocks to an otherwise stable system'; 'the crash of 2008-09 was due to a 'global savings glut', and so on. It can be shown that none of these notions are supported by the facts

Attacks by the ideological apparatuses on ideas of Medicare for All, green new deal, socialism, and Modern Money Theory, are the new ideological offensives, now being added to the old.

Wall St. types are now leading the charge. One of the main champions of distortion from among their ranks is David Rubenstein, a host of many well known (among investors and watchers of Bloomberg news TV) interviews of famous US capitalists, and who is also a co-founder of the Carlyl Group, one of the biggest Private Equity firms (and thus shadow banks) in the world. (The Bush family has been a big investor in Carlyl). Rubinstein has been giving interviews all over on the media and attending elite conferences, attacking MMT, green new deal, medicare for all, etc. He always ends up as well with the further attack on social security retirement, mouthing the typical garbage that it's going broke in a couple of years and therefore benefits must be cut, especially raising the retirement age (to as high as 80).

Rubenstein was joined this past week by another of his shadow banker buddies, Paul Singer of the big hedge fund Elliott Management. Together they were interviewed by Bloomberg hosts at the Aspen Conference, a gathering of the US economic elite. Bloomberg hosts fed them loaded questions about Medicare for all, social security retirement, MMT and all the rest.

The essence of Rubenstein-Singer's attack on Medicare for All, is to grossly distort its cost, while arguing 180 million Americans love their private, employer provided health insurance. In distorting the costs they echoes the same themes being peddled around the media now by lesser hired, and well paid ideologists, in the business media, think tanks, cable shows, etc.

The gist of the attack on Medicare for All is they conveniently ignore the facts that 162 million US workers (the size of the US labor force today) pay only a tax of 1.45% on payroll while working, and the nearly 60 million over age 65 pay only a \$135 annual deductible when retired when they collect Medicare.

Compare that 'cost' to those households still on private health insurance. According to Kaiser Foundation's latest report this past week, the cost of premiums for private health insurance have risen from \$5000 a year in 2001 to \$20,000 a year 2016 (no doubt higher now under Trump). That \$20k is \$1,666 a month. And that's not counting the tens of millions who can't afford that and who have had to opt for the barely affordable private insurance, now paying \$2k to \$5k annual deductibles, thousands of dollars more in co-pays, and even so facing hundreds of health procedures not even covered. And then there's the tens of millions who can't afford anything—even Obamacare since their states won't participate or, if they do, the premiums have escalated beyond affordability.

That's a comparison of Medicare, with a cost of just low hundreds of dollars a year, compared to private health insurance costing \$20k a year on average and more, and sometimes far more. But you'll never hear that comparison or facts from Rubenstein-Elliott or the other of their ilk. That's because they simple 'delete' reference to such facts when they talk about and attack Medicare for All. But that's how ideology works. Delete the facts, insert false facts, invert the logic, reverse causation, argue correlation is causation, etc. It's all about 'language games' to distort the truth, so they can attack and propose their solutions that benefit them and not the rest.

Then there's Rubenstein-Singer's further ideological argument that 180 million want to keep their private health insurance coverage instead of being forced onto Medicare. Well, if the rich want to pay for private coverage on top of the minimal healthcare tax, they can certainly do so in the proposals for Medicare for All on the table right now. But it's not likely that the more than 100 million US households now being gouged by private health insurance will want to keep those token plans and not want to go to Medicare. If they were so happy with their current health insurance, why do 74% of voters now say they are dissatisfied with the current health insurance system?

And there's the growing ideological assault on anything that has to do with making the rich pay taxes or having government spend on programs that benefit the rest of us, not just corporations and investors.

What used to be accepted social programs in the 50s, 60s and 70s, designed to provide

income for the middle class and working class (really the same folks), is now painted with the broad brush of 'socialism'. Invest in alternative energy, that's socialism. Provide relief to the tens of millions of students in debt to the tune of \$1.5 trillion, that's socialism too. Medicare? That's really socialism. No tuition at public colleges...socialism. (But let government gouge students with 6.8% interest rates on student debt, while letting banks borrow at 0.25%, that's ok. That's not socialism). Stop writing government checks (\$79 billion last year) to corporations with big profits, that's socialism for the capitalists but that kind of socialism is ok). What were in past decades 'normal' social programs and spending are now being conveniently labeled 'socialist'. But let them continue with that ideological theme, I say. It's convincing two-thirds of millennials, now the biggest population group, that they prefer 'socialism' to the present capitalism, according to recent polls. (Of course, 'socialism' to them so far means 'anything but the above', but that's a good place to start).

Then there's the more sophisticated ideological attack on the emerging idea of Modern Money Theory, or MMT. Rubinstein-Singer are really against that as well. MMT in one of its propositions (elements of meaning of an idea) calls for fiscal-social spending by the central bank, the Fed, creating money and using it to fund infrastructure spending and social programs that would benefit the rest of us. It's interesting to watch Rubinstein & Co. attack that. They say, 'Oh, it would mean excess money and inflation, create too much debt at the central bank, it would mean a rising national debt further out of control, and so on.

But wait a minute. That's just what the Fed did since 2009 with its 'quantitative easing' QE program that bailed out the banks with trillion dollar cash injections, followed by zero borrowing rates for bankers like Rubinstein and Singer for 7 more years. One didn't hear Rubinstein-Elliott and friends complain about that QMT, 'QE Money Theory', because it directly benefited them. Their shadow banks-private equity firms, hedge funds, etc.-got to borrow at 0.15% for years after they were even bailed out (by 2010). They got free money from the Fed until 2016, and then the cost of borrowing went up a miniscule couple of percentages (still way below the 6.8% that students had to keep borrowing at). They loved QE and never complained about debt, inflation in stocks and bond prices, or the massive income and wealth they accumulated personally because of QE.

QE was just MMT turned on its head. Now the theorists of MMT are just trying to turn the tables on the Rubinsteins, Elliotts, et. al., by saying let's do QE for the rest of us now. But no, in their view, the rest of us have to continue to settle for austerity in government spending-i.e. cuts in food stamps, education, transport services, medicaid, etc. We have to pay higher taxes to finance Trump's \$4 trillion tax cuts for corporations, investors and the wealthy 1% households and for Trump's annual \$100 billion a year hikes in war spending.

QE, low rates, and tax cuts are for them; 6.8% for students and tax hikes are for us. And don't dare ask for Medicare for All, green new deals, free tuition, student debt relief, etc. It's too costly. It won't work. It will wreck the system, according to Rubinstein-Singer.

But the policies of the Rubinsteins, Singers, and the Goldman-Sachrs and Trump now running government policy-i.e. shadow bankers all-have cost too much. Haven't worked. And have already 'wrecked the system'.

What they want is to continue the annual \$trillion dollar plus distribution of income to their class via stock buybacks and dividend payouts (\$1.3 trillion in 2018 and projected \$1.4 trillion this year). Tax cuts and cheap money (QMT/QE) have enabled that historic income redistribution via stock, bond, and other capital gains markets.

Medicare for All and expanding social security retirement by raising the 'cap' on social security plus taxing capital incomes; bailing out students with a financial transaction tax, funding a green new deal by reversing 40 years of tax cutting for the rich and their corporations—all will mean taking back some of their \$1.3 trillion firehose of income redistribution since 2008. Rubinstein & friends know that. And they don't want that.

So Rubinstein and his buddies are now touring the country attacking proposals that would do that, and socialism in general, by distorting, misrepresenting, and outright lying about what these programs mean. Using the various techniques of playing with language to change the original meanings. To arm their class with the 'talking points' to carry on the attack locally as well. To establish the 'messages' for their media to carry via various channels daily thereafter. To get naive economist-apologists to parrot and legitimize the economic ideology as economic science in their journal articles.

The fundamental message of their ideological offensive is: Socialism for the rich: good; socialism for the rest of us: bad. Tax cuts for the rich and their corporations: good; tax cuts for the rest: bad. Subsidy checks to profitable corporations: good; subsidizing of health care or education: bad. Free money from the Fed (QE) for them: good; free money from the Fed (MMT) for us: bad.

But that's always been how ideology in economic policy works. Only the targeted themes have changed today. The methodology of language manipulation is the same. So too are the direct beneficiaries. Just pour the new wine into the old bottles and 'waterboard' it, if necessary, down our throats through repetitive messaging from the institutions that deliver the ideological messaging.

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