

Social Crisis in America. Coming Soon: Corporate Town Halls Against Social Security

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In the old days the U.S. government used different tactics to trick the population into accepting policies that only the elite wanted. For example, it took legions of hired speakers (propagandists) to travel the country and to explain to people the “necessity” of fighting WWI and WWII. Movie stars were put on the government payroll, too, dazzling and awe-striking working people into buying war bonds and constantly cheerleading the war effort.

Not much has changed. Although the corporate-controlled media is a highly effective tool to influence the public to accept wars-for-profit (Iraq and Afghanistan), some policies are so unpopular they require the old tactics be revived.

Take for instance Social Security. The corporate-elite have written tirelessly on this subject recently. They agree that it should be reduced, and that you should wait until you reach an older age before receiving it. Working people disagree.

Thus, a series of national “town halls” has been organized to convince people of the “necessity” of this policy ([usabudgetdiscussion.org](#)). The stated purpose is to have a national “discussion” to figure out ways to best deal with the nation’s budget deficit.

But instead of the government organizing these town halls, the corporate establishment will – a fact that reveals much about the deterioration of democracy in the U.S.

The group organizing the national town halls is the “non-partisan and non-profit” America Speaks. But scratching the surface of this purportedly harmless group reveals a corporate snake pit. America Speak’s Board of Directors and National Advisory Board showcase an impressive list of corporate CEO’s, CFO’s, consultants, politicians, and elite law firms. Not a single voice from working people is to be found.

Even more revealing are the groups funding the town halls: all private, elite foundations, such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Kellogg cereal), and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (John D. was one of the wealthiest men in America when he died).

The Kellogg Foundation is most notorious for spearheading the attack on public education. Along with the Bill Gates foundation and others, the Kellogg Foundation gives vast sums of money to encourage the formations of for-profit charter schools.

The MacArthur Foundation is especially interested in Social Security. On its website the foundation explains its interest in the politics of aging, while giving support to the “bi-

partisan” solution being proposed by Democrats and Republicans, outlined in the book, *Choosing the Nation’s Fiscal Future*, written by a variety of “experts” belonging to different corporate think tanks and other elite groups (www.ourfiscalfuture.org).

Here is a partial description of *Choosing the Nation’s Fiscal Future*:

“This comprehensive book considers a range of policy changes that could help put the budget on a sustainable path: reforms to reduce the rate of growth in spending for Medicare and Medicaid; options to reduce the growth rate of Social Security benefits or raise payroll taxes; and changes in many other government spending programs and tax policies.”

Page 112 of the book says:

“Commonly discussed changes to reduce the future growth of [Social Security] benefits include: raising the full-benefit retirement age and the earliest retirement age; reducing the additional benefit percentage for spouses; reducing the postretirement cost-of-living adjustment; increasing the number of years used to compute average earnings; and changing the way initial benefit levels (i.e., at retirement) are calculated so that they grow more slowly than wages for higher earners.”

The book also discusses ways to reduce the cost of Medicare at the expense of Medicare recipients.

These are the ideas that will dominate not only the national town hall meetings, but President Obama’s National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, which is a “bi-partisan” group to give Congress recommendations to reduce the budget deficit.

In reality, Obama’s hand picked group is full of anti-Social Security right-wingers combined with corporate Democrats and — most shamefully — the recently retired President of Service Employees International Union, Andy Stern. The conclusions of Obama’s commission are forgone, which is why they will not be released until after the fall elections.

Social Security and Medicare are the two bedrock programs of the U.S. social safety net. They are incredibly popular, having been won after immense social struggle in the 1930’s and 1940’s. It will take another struggle now to maintain and expand them - a fight that cannot be waged within the political party that first enacted the programs.

The Democrats are working hand-in-hand with the Republicans to enact these measures, as they did with the corporate bailouts, Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and years of lowering the taxes of America’s rich — all policies that have created the U.S. budget deficit.

Making phone calls or writing letters to Democratic congressmen will not save Social Security and Medicare, since corporate groups have already written these politicians large checks.

The fight to save these valuable social programs — along with public education, transportation, and social services in general — must be brought to the streets, where working people can unite and demand that the corporations and the rich pay for the crisis

they created — through progressive taxation — so that the social safety net can be saved and expanded for the vast majority of people. All labor unions and working-class community groups have a duty to organize their members towards this effort.

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