

The Fight to Save Social Security Begins

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With national elections barely over, Republicans and Democrats unveiled their real political agenda, in the form of Obama's Deficit Reduction Commission. The bi-partisan commission has a nightmare vision for working people that, if implemented, will remold American society to mirror the current ruler of U.S. politics — the corporations and wealthy.

<http://www.fiscalcommission.gov/news/cochairs-proposal>

The commission openly attacks Social Security and Medicare. The retirement age would be raised from 67 to 68 (for those born after 1959) and from 68 to 69 (for everyone born after 2006). This is divide and rule at its best, meant to target only specific ages of the population in phases, while ignoring those who are currently about to retire.

But current retirees will be affected too. The social security cost of living adjustment will be unhinged from the inflation index to save money, meaning, that payments will decrease via inflation on a possibly annual basis.

Medicare will be cut too. Beneficiaries will pay an estimated \$85 billion out of their pockets [!] from 2011-2020, in the form of increased co-pays, deductibles, and other measures. Payments to doctors will decrease, meaning, that fewer doctors will accept Medicaid. This attack on Medicare comes on the heels of the assault Obama launched in his health care "reform;" the program is being reduced to shambles.

Shockingly, one of the commission's options for tax reform worsens the measures that caused the U.S. deficit in the first place. The Reagan/Bush/Bush Jr. tax cuts for the very wealthy — that depleted federal revenue — would be further increased so that the tax rates would be reduced from 35 to 23 percent (The Obama Administration has recently signaled that it is willing to renege on its pledge to overturn the Bush Jr. tax cuts).

Corporate taxes would be likewise lowered from 35 to 26 percent.

Consequently, taxes on working people are proposed to be raised, albeit indirectly: those fortunate enough to own a home will no longer get a tax deduction for home mortgage interest.

Workers with employee health care will see their health care taxed as income [!].

The federal gas tax will be doubled.

And lastly, the federal workforce will be reduced by about 200,000 by 2015, while those who are retired will see their pensions reduced.

These proposals were explained as a “starting point,” with the implication that cuts could be even deeper.

Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO, responded to the commissions proposals by saying:

“The chairmen of the Deficit Commission just told working Americans to ‘Drop Dead.’ Especially in these tough economic times, it is unconscionable to be proposing cuts to the critical economic lifelines for working people, Social Security and Medicare.”

“What we need to be focusing on now is the jobs deficit. Working families already paid for Wall Street’s party that tanked our economy [the Bush/Obama bank bailouts].”

Trumka is right. He also has a responsibility to back up his words with action. The AFL-CIO and Change to Win unions need to embark on a massive educational campaign about the above bi-partisan proposals that will be implemented, not just by the Republicans, but by Obama and the Democrats.

The unions then need to mobilize a united labor fightback where they demand of the government that it create a massive public works project to put 20 million people back to work, including not only the officially unemployed but the partially employed and those who have given up looking, while taxing Wall Street to pay for it. Labor officials, from the state, city, and workplace level must lead a broad labor-community alliance to confront these attacks on working people.

All working people have an interest in saving these valuable social programs. Labor and community organizations could unite in local education/action coalitions that aim to save Social Security and Medicare and to create jobs, by raising taxes on the wealthy and corporations to pre-Reagan levels.

The hundreds of millions of dollars that both labor federations spent to elect Democrats has been squandered, again. Working people need to act independently to repulse this bi-partisan attack. The clock is ticking.

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