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Social Security Facts vs Fog

by: [DaveJ](#)

Wed Nov 24, 2010 at 17:30

Conservative just hate Social Security. The Social Security program is an example of government at its best. It demonstrates We, the People taking care of and watching out for each other. It works, it is efficient and effective, and people love it. For their war against government to work conservatives have to find a way to undermine Social Security.

Conservatives have been at war with Social Security since its inception. They call it a "Ponzi scheme." They claim that it is "going broke." They claim that people live longer so we should increase the retirement age... They claim a lot of things. The question is, are any of them true? Or is each just one more area where conservatives are trying to throw up a smokescreen to mask their real intentions? (because it's what they do.)

How much of what we hear about Social Security are facts, and how much is just fog?

One thing that most people do not know is that conservatives have been following an actual plan, a step-by-step strategy to get rid of Social Security, that was laid out a couple of decades ago. A 1983 Cato Institute Journal document, "Achieving a Leninist Strategy" by Stuart Butler of the Cato Institute and Peter Germanis of The Heritage Foundation lays it out for us. [The document](#) is still available at Cato, and select quotes are available at [Plotting Privatization?](#) from Z Magazine. It is worth reading the entire document (in particular the section "Weakening the Opposition") to understand completely the strategy that has been unfolding in the years since, but the following quotes give you an idea:

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"Lenin recognized that fundamental change is contingent upon ... its success in isolating and weakening its opponents. ... we would do well to draw a few lessons from the Leninist strategy."

" construct ... a coalition that will ... reap benefits from the IRA-based private system ... but also the banks, insurance companies, and other institutions that will gain from providing such plans to the public."

"The first element consists of a campaign to achieve small legislative changes that embellish the present IRA system, making it in practice a small-scale private Social Security system.

"The second main element ... involves what one might crudely call guerrilla warfare against both the current Social Security system and the coalition that supports it."

"The banking industry and other business groups that can benefit from expanded IRAs ..." "... the strategy must be to propose moving to a private Social Security system in such a way as to ... neutralize ... the coalition that supports the existing system."

"The next Social Security crisis may be further away than many people believe. ... it could be many years before the conditions are such that a radical reform of Social Security is possible. But then, as Lenin well knew, to be a successful revolutionary, one must also be patient and consistently plan for real reform."

So there you have it. This shows how many of the arguments are just fog, not fact. And it shows how private interests intend to "reap benefits" from getting rid of Social Security: namely, *they* get a lot of the money instead of the retirees.

This time the attack is riding piggyback on concerns about budget deficits. First there was a big bruhaha about deficits, then the answer is offered: cut Social Security's benefits. But Social Security is not allowed to borrow by law, so it cannot



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contribute to deficits. In fact, since the 1983 changes in the program Social Security has run surpluses, not deficits, and has built up a huge trust fund! Social Security won't run short until possibly 2037, and even then can pay most of its benefits with no changes. (Compare that to the military budget, which has to borrow hundreds of billions every single year.)

Last time it was President George W Bush attacking the program. Remember? Social Security was supposed to be "in crisis" and needed to be "privatized." The fog machine was trying to convince us to put the money into the stock market. But progressives rallied, saved the program, and now it is years later and the program is fine. Imagine where we would be if the program had been put into stocks!

Other times the fog machine has told us that Social Security "has a lower return" than putting the money into other investments, even though it is more than just retirement funds and also provides disability payments and other benefits. Or that there aren't as many workers per retiree as there used to be, even though that is not how the program works. Or that people live longer, even though that is mostly because fewer babies die. (The program was designed for increasing longevity and the 1983 changes accounted for any differences.) There is always a new attack.

Whatever the current attack might be, keep in mind that it is just one more attack. Instead of spending all your time trying to refute each lie while they throw up a dozen more, remember that they hate Social Security and they just lie. Of course, there is a risk that each time Social Security is attacked more of the public will get the idea that something must be wrong with the program, when there isn't. Keeping in mind that there is a corporate/conservative strategy at work to undermine the program helps to fight off the fog.

For politicians, Nancy Altman and Eric Kingson of the [Strengthen Social Security coalition](#) have a warning. In an LA Times op-ed the other day, [Touching the 'third rail'](#), they wrote,

For all the talk of polarization, the American people are clear and united about Social Security. A recent poll of those who voted in the midterm election found that 67% of respondents opposed cuts in benefits; 69% opposed raising the Social Security retirement age to 69. Respondents were also clear about what steps should be taken to address a looming shortfall. Some 66% of those polled favored doing away with the current cap on payroll taxes to fund Social Security. Currently, taxpayers are taxed only on their first \$106,800 in income. Simply requiring upper-income taxpayers to pay the tax on all their income would bring in enough revenue to allow benefits to be raised across the board and still have the program in balance for at least the next 75 years.

... The message of the midterm election is that the American people are fed up with Washington elites who don't seem to listen. Despite the clear view of the American people, the elites in Washington seem to think it would be better to reduce benefits than to require the wealthy to pay the same percentage of their salaries into Social Security as everyone else does.

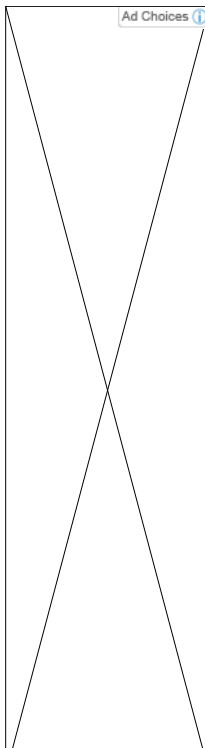
If politicians choose to cut Social Security benefits, when they could simply scrap the cap, we predict that this midterm will seem like a walk in the park compared to what awaits them in 2012.

Take Action

Don't mess with Social Security! November 30 is national Call Congress day, to say HANDS OFF SOCIAL SECURITY! [Click the link to learn more.](#)

Also, sign this petition from Campaign for America's Future and CREDO Action, [Tell Obama: Reject Social Security Cuts](#)

(Also see Angry Bear: [BW on Soc Sec V: What does Lenin have to do with this?](#))



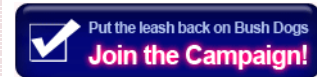
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I'm going provide some actual data since the dog ate your links for your statements.

"Or that there aren't as many workers per retiree as there used to be, even though that is not how the program works."

Number of Americans older than 65 in 1940: 9.0 million
 Number of Americans older than 65 in 2000: 34.9 million
 %increase 287.8%

Number of Americans in 1940: 132,164,569
 Number of Americans in 2000: 281,421,906
 %increase 112.9% increase

In 1940: 6.8% of the population could collect social security
 In 2000: 12.1% of the population could collect social security

Social security is set up as a system where current workers directly fund current retirees. Currently, the social security trust fund can build a surplus, but apparently cannot go into the negatives. This does set it up to be vulnerable to demographic shifts in periods of time where retirees outnumber workers. One solution might be to allow the fund to take on debt to maintain benefits riding out the typical cyclical nature of demographics.

"Or that people live longer, even though that is mostly because fewer babies die."

Life expectancy in 1950 at age 65:
 Male: 12.7 Female 14.7
 Life expectancy in 2007 at age 65:
 Male: 17.2 Female: 19.9
 Delta Increase: 4.5 years for males 5.2 years for females

Social security retirement age maximum at inception: 65
 Social security retirement age maximum current: 67
 Delta Increase: 2 Years

<http://www.ssa.gov/history/lif...>
<http://www.cdc.gov/NCHS/data/n...>
<http://govpubs.lib.umn.edu/cen...>
<http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/age...>

by: [Zugzugzug](#) @ *Wed Nov 24, 2010 at 18:02:59 PM CST*

The point (4.00 / 4)

is that none of these right-wing talking points affect Social Security. They are just tricks to make people think something is wrong with Social Security.

It DOESN'T MATTER how many workers per retiree there are.

It DOESN'T MATTER what percentage is on Social Security.

It DOESN'T MATTER if life expectancy has changed.

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