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The Sour Grapes of Jason Furman

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I've reported on how Larry Summers, denied a job in the Biden administration, has been providing aid, comfort, and ammunition to right-wing critics by blasting Biden's long-overdue public-investment program as too large and dangerously inflationary. Summers's less well-known colleague from the Obama administration, Jason Furman, has been doing the same, in spades, and deserves a closer look.

Furman is a protégé of Robert Rubin. He ran the Rubin-funded Hamilton Project housed at Brookings, which has mostly sponsored small-bore initiatives that would make little difference in the grotesque inequality of income and wealth, and provide no threat to the deeper structure of American capitalism.

Furman became economic director of the Obama campaign in mid-2008, correctly signaling that the Obama presidency would be a disappointment to economic progressives. From there, he became Summers's deputy on the National Economic Council and then chair of the Council of Economic Advisers in 2013.

In recent years, Furman has called for a reduction in the corporate income tax rate, opposed student debt relief, and warned of the inflationary effects of the Biden investment program. In May, Furman wrote a paper contending that school closures and lack of child care were not retarding the recovery, at a time when Biden and his staff were working hard to get relief on both fronts. Politico commented that Furman's stance could help Biden's opponents.

And it did. Also in May, Furman told Bloomberg TV that the \$300 a week in extra jobless benefits was holding back a jobs recovery in some parts of the country. Furman said of the Biden package as a whole, "It's definitely too big for the moment. I don't know any economist that was recommending something the size of what was done."

Really? That sure leaves out a lot of respected mainstream economists. But the Cato Institute loved Furman's comment.

And in a recent series of tweets, Furman has doubled down on his attack on Biden's program, contending that "90%+" of macroeconomists not part of the D.C. debate "think the American Rescue Plan was too large." If that's true, it tells you a lot about what's wrong with what passes for mainstream economics.

Furman and Summers, both passed over for Biden jobs, are now at Harvard. Their sniping is an irritation, but it's sure a mercy that they were not brought into the administration.