

Columns

Harvey Wasserman

Bush to Social Security: Drop Dead

February 5, 2005

Let's cut the actuarial doublespeak: Bush comes not to save Social Security, but to bury it.



Ever since Franklin Roosevelt installed the most successful social program in US history, far right fanatics of the Bush ilk have been trying to destroy it. They may be on the brink of succeeding.

Fundamentalist conservatives despise any social welfare program that works. Their stark ideological crusade demands the dismantling of any program through which society can exert control over the economy or our common heritage, such as the natural environment.

Their demand is precisely the opposite when it comes to personal and cultural behavior. The fundamentalist right WANTS the government (if they control it) to legislate "morality" when it comes to sexual choice (gay marriage), recreational preferences (marijuana), women's rights (freedom to choose), free speech (the Patriot Act), free press (censorship), sexual expression (the FCC), religion (official prayer), education (evolution), human rights (Guantanamo), the sanctity of life (the death penalty) and much more.

In other words, in the name of "family values," it's fine to insert the government into our personal lives.

But when it comes to the economy, it's survival-of-the-fittest Social Darwinism all the way. The corporate rich are the Elect of God. Any interference with their absolute power is a heathen affront. To aid those less fortunate is to prolong the existence of inferior beings who are predetermined for Divine rejection.

That means dismantling all government programs that might help anyone other than the very rich. Or that stand in the way of destroying the natural environment to pave the way for the return of the Messiah.

It's important to make the rational arguments about why Bush's plan to "save" Social Security will result in its destruction.

But it's equally crucial to remember that Bush is not really about saving Social Security. This latest assault is about destroying it -- consciously, willfully, utterly. It's the latest installment in a rightist crusade that's been going on since Social Security was born.

Under normal circumstances, ascribing motive can be a dicey game. But these are not normal people. Karl Rove, Grover Norquist, Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, Kenneth Blackwell and the rest of the far fundamentalist right are religious and ideological fanatics that have learned well the rhetoric of Orwell.

So Bush spouts off about "saving" Social Security just as he trashed Iraq over "Weapons of Mass Destruction" to "bring them democracy." We hear from his ilk endless rhetoric about "Clear Skies" and "Healthy Forests" and "Leave No Child Behind" and "ending AIDS" and "an inspiring Ohio election" and other TV-friendly sound bites that mask reality.

For the obvious outcome is precisely the opposite. And nowhere is that clearer than with Social Security.

This proven program has stuck in the rightist craw ever since their "Great Satan," FDR, made it the centerpiece of history's most successful array of liberal social legislation. For seventy years the New Deal's Social Security, unemployment insurance, overtime guarantees, rights of organized labor, educational programs and much more have made

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this country a decent place to live for tens of millions who belong to the social classes beneath Bush's Divinely ordained Darwinian super-rich.

It's that whole liberal edifice of social justice and true community that the right wing hates. Bush's grotesque use of the word compassion is perfectly designed to gut the term of all meaning. Every one of his programs aims in exactly the opposite direction.

Starting with Social Security. Paul Krugman and an earnest army of economists, statisticians, actuaries and others have shown and will continue to show in painstaking detail that Bush's plans for "saving" Social Security will actually destroy it.

But the key thing to remember is that despite what he says, destroying it is exactly what Bush is about. The Rove/Norquist fanatics that write Bush's speeches see Social Security as the final lynchpin in the New Deal's social justice legacy.

And that's what they want obliterated. Along with your right to a comfortable retirement, free from the need to work their fundamentalist check-out counters or to sleep in their Social Darwinist cardboard boxes.

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