

Republicans Are Coming for Your Social Security and Medicare

The warning signs are already here.

By **Thom Hartmann** / **Independent Media Institute**

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The billionaire fascists are coming for your Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. And they're openly bragging about it.

Right after Trump's election, back in December of 2016, Newt Gingrich **openly bragged** at the Heritage Foundation that the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress were going to "break out of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt model." That "model," of course, created what we today refer to as "the middle class."

This week Mitch McConnell confirmed Gingrich's prophecy, using the huge deficits created by Trump's billionaire tax cuts as an excuse to destroy "entitlement" programs.

“I think it would be safe to say that the single biggest disappointment of my time in Congress has been our failure to address the entitlement issue, and it’s a shame, because now the Democrats are promising Medicare for All,” **McConnell told Bloomberg**. He added, “[W]e’re talking about Medicare, Social Security and Medicaid.”

These programs, along with free public education and progressive taxation, are the core drivers and maintainers of the American middle class. History shows that without a strong middle class, democracy itself collapses, and fascism is the next step down a long and terrible road.

Ever since the election of Ronald Reagan, Republicans have been working overtime to kneecap institutions that support the American middle class. And, as any working-class family can tell you, the GOP has had some substantial successes, particularly in shifting both income and political power away from voters and toward billionaires and transnational corporations.

In July of 2015, discussing SCOTUS’s 5 to 4 conservative vote on *Citizens United*, **President Jimmy Carter told me**: “It violates the essence of what made America a great country in its political system. Now it’s just an oligarchy with unlimited political bribery...” He added: “[W]e’ve just seen a complete subversion of our political system as a payoff to major contributors...”

As Princeton **researchers Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page demonstrated** in an exhaustive analysis of the difference between what most Americans *want* their politicians to do legislatively, versus what American politicians *actually* do, it’s pretty clear that President Carter was right.

They found that while the legislative priorities of the top 10 percent of Americans are consistently made into law, things the bottom 90 percent want are ignored. In other words, today in America, democracy only “works” for the top 10 percent of Americans.

For thousands of years, economists and economic observers from Aristotle to Adam Smith to Thomas Piketty have told us that a “middle class” is *not* a

normal byproduct of raw, unregulated capitalism—what right-wing ideologues call “the free market.”

Instead, unregulated markets—particularly markets not regulated by significant taxation on predatory incomes—invariably lead to the opposite of a healthy middle class: they produce extremes of inequality, which are as dangerous to democracy as cancer is to a living being.

With so-called “unregulated free markets,” the rich become super-rich, while grinding poverty spreads among working people like a heroin epidemic. This further polarizes the nation, both economically and politically, which, perversely, further cements the power of the oligarchs. While there’s a clear moral dimension to this—pointed out by Adam Smith in his classic *Theory of Moral Sentiments*—there’s also a vital political dimension.

Smith noted, in 1759, that, “All constitutions of government are valued only in proportion as they tend to promote the happiness of those who live under them. This is their sole use and end.”

Smith added a cautionary note, however: “[The] disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition... is the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.”

Jefferson was acutely aware of this: the Declaration of Independence was the first founding document of any nation in the history of the world that explicitly declared “happiness” as a “right” that should be protected and promoted by government against predations by the very wealthy.

That was not at all, however, a consideration for the architects of supply-side Reaganomics, although they appropriated JFK’s “rising tide lifts all boats” metaphor to sell their hustle to (boatless) working people.

Far more troubling (and well-known to both Smith and virtually all of our nation’s founders), however, was Aristotle’s observation that when a nation pursues economic/political activities that destroy its middle class, it will inevitably devolve either into mob rule or oligarchy. As he noted in *Politics*:

“Now in all states there are three elements: one class is very rich, another very poor, and a third in a mean. ... But a [government] ought to be composed, as far as possible, of equals and similars; and these are generally the middle classes.

“Thus it is manifest that the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class, and that those states are likely to be well-administered in which the middle class is large, and stronger if possible than both the other classes, or at any rate than either singly; for the addition of the middle class turns the scale, and prevents either of the extremes from being dominant.”

This is **how America was** for the Boomer generation until about two decades ago: a 30-year-old in the 1970s had a 90 percent chance of having or attaining a higher standard of living than his or her parents. But, since the 1980s introduction of Reaganomics, there’s been more than a **70 percent drop in “social mobility”**—the ability to move from one economic station of life into a better one.

So, if our democratic republic is to return to democracy and what’s left of our middle class is to survive (or even grow), how do we do that? History shows that the two primary regulators within a capitalist system that provide for the emergence of a middle class are progressive taxation and a healthy social safety net.

As Jefferson noted in a **1785 letter to Madison**, “Another means of silently lessening the inequality of property is to exempt all from taxation below a certain point, and to tax the higher portions of property in geometrical progression as they rise.”

Similarly, Thomas Paine, proposing in *Agrarian Justice* (1797) what we today call Social Security, said that a democracy can only survive when its people “[S]ee before them the certainty of escaping the miseries that under other governments accompany old age...” Such a strong social safety net, Paine argued, “will have an advocate and an ally in the heart of all nations.”

Tragically, Republicans are today planning to destroy both our nation’s progressive taxation system *and* our social safety net, in obsequious service to their billionaire paymasters.

Flipping Jefferson and FDR on their heads, Republicans last year passed a multi-trillion-dollar tax break for the rich, with a few-hundred-dollars bone tossed in for working people.

Meanwhile, Republicans are already hard at work dismantling the last remnants of the New Deal and the Great Society.

As [Ian Milhiser notes](#), “Republicans in the House hope to [cut Social Security benefits by 20–50 percent](#). Speaker Paul Ryan’s plan to voucherize Medicare would [drive up out-of-pocket costs for seniors by about 40 percent](#). Then he’d [cut Medicaid by between a third and a half](#).” This is not, of course, the first time Republicans have tried this. They’ve been trying to dismantle Social Security since 1936, and Reagan himself even recorded [a 33 RPM LP](#) calling LBJ’s Great Society proposal for a program called “Medicare” as “socialism,” saying that if it passed then one day we’d all look back “remembering the time when men were free.”

And it’s always been in service to the same agenda—handing political and economic power over the morbidly rich and the corporations that got them there.

In earlier times, we had a word for this takeover of democracy by the morbidly rich and the corporations: fascism.

As I’ve [written before](#), in early 1944, the New York Times asked Vice President Henry Wallace to, as Wallace noted, “write a piece answering the following questions: What is a fascist? How many fascists have we? How dangerous are they?”

Vice President Wallace’s answer to those questions was published in the [New York Times on April 9, 1944](#), at the height of the war against the Axis powers of Germany and Japan.

“The really dangerous American fascists,” Wallace wrote, “are not those who are hooked up directly or indirectly with the Axis. The FBI has its finger on those. ... The American fascist would prefer not to use violence. His method is to poison the channels of public information.

“With a fascist the problem is never how best to present the truth to the public,” Wallace continued, “but how best to use the news to deceive the public into giving the fascist and his group more money or more power.” In this, Wallace was using the classic definition of the word “fascist”—the definition Mussolini had in mind when he **claimed** to have invented the word.

As the 1983 American Heritage Dictionary noted, fascism is: “A system of government that exercises a dictatorship of the extreme right, typically through the merging of state and business leadership, together with belligerent nationalism.”

Vice President Wallace bluntly laid out in his 1944 Times article his concern about the same happening here in America: “American fascism will not be really dangerous until there is a purposeful coalition among the cartelists, [and] the deliberate poisoners of public information...”

He could have been describing Fox, right-wing hate radio, and the billionaires who keep today’s GOP in power.

Noting that, “Fascism is a worldwide disease,” Wallace further suggested that fascism’s “greatest threat to the United States will come after the war” and will manifest “within the United States itself.”

Watching the Republicans of his day work from the same anti-worker playbook they are today, Wallace added: “Still another danger is represented by those who, paying lip service to democracy and the common welfare, in their insatiable greed for money and the power which money gives, do not hesitate surreptitiously to evade the laws designed to safeguard the public from monopolistic extortion.”

As Wallace wrote, some in big business “are willing to jeopardize the structure of American liberty to gain some temporary advantage.”

In a comment prescient of Donald Trump’s trashing of “Mexican rapists” and “gangs” in Chicago, Wallace wrote: “The symptoms of fascist thinking are colored by environment and adapted to immediate circumstances. But always and everywhere they can be identified by their appeal to prejudice

and by the desire to play upon the fears and vanities of different groups in order to gain power.

“It is no coincidence that the growth of modern tyrants has in every case been heralded by the growth of prejudice.”

And that prejudice would be exploited to win elections so that the fascists could rob the people and enhance their own power and wealthy.

But even at this, Wallace noted, American fascists would still have to lie to the people in order to gain power. And if the day ever came when a billionaire opened a “news” network just to promote fascist thinking, they could promote their lies with ease.

“The American fascists are most easily recognized by their deliberate perversion of truth and fact,” Wallace wrote. “Their newspapers and propaganda carefully cultivate every fissure of disunity, every crack in the common front against fascism. They use every opportunity to impugn democracy.”

In his strongest indictment of the tide of fascism the vice president of the United States saw rising in America, he added: “They claim to be super-patriots, but they would destroy every liberty guaranteed by the Constitution. They demand free enterprise, but are the spokesmen for monopoly and vested interest. Their final objective, toward which all their deceit is directed, is to capture political power so that using the power of the State and the power of the market simultaneously they may keep the common man in eternal subjection.”

In the election of 2018, we stand at a crossroad that Roosevelt and Wallace only imagined.

Billionaire-funded fascism is rising in America, calling itself “conservatism” and “Trumpism.”

The Republican candidates’ and their billionaire donors’ behavior today eerily parallels that day in 1936 when Roosevelt said, “In vain they seek to hide behind the flag and the Constitution. In their blindness they forget what

the flag and the Constitution stand for.” President Roosevelt and Vice President Wallace’s warnings are more urgent now than ever before.

If Trump and the billionaire fascists who bankroll the Republicans succeed in destroying the last supports for America’s enfeebled middle class, including Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid—and succeed in blocking any possibility of Medicare for All or free college and trade school—not only will the bottom 90 percent of Americans suffer, but what little democracy we have left in this republic will evaporate. History, from Greek and Roman times through Europe in the first half of the 20th century, suggests it will probably be replaced by a violent, kleptocratic oligarchy that no longer shrinks from words like “fascist.”

The warning signs are already here, and, in the face of nationwide election fraud based in Republican voter purges, we must turn out massive numbers if we’re to preserve the American Dream and finally make it available to all.

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