

Times columnist David Brooks exposes “left” supporters of Obama health plan

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Conservative *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, a fairly conscious representative of his class, is among the more perceptive commentators in the bourgeois media. Writing primarily for the benefit of the political and corporate elite, Brooks often attempts to cut through the fog of lies used by politicians to sell their reactionary agendas to the public in order to explain what is really going on to those who need to know.

Brooks’ column on Friday (“The Dime Standard”) is a case in point. It is full of praise for Obama’s health care speech on Wednesday, correctly analyzing its right-wing character. As such, it is a devastating exposure of Obama’s “left” supporters in publications such as the *Nation*, which are doing their part to sell Obama’s proposals to the American people.

“Obama delivered the finest speech of his presidency,” Brooks begins. “Best of all for those who admire the political craft,” he continues, “was the speech’s seductive nature and careful ambiguity. Obama threw out enough rhetorical chum to keep the liberals happy, yet he subtly staked out ground in the center on nearly every substantive issue in order to win over the moderates needed to get anything passed.”

In other words, Obama’s speech was bookended by lies and phony concern for the uninsured and the elderly, while the substance was thoroughly right-wing.

“First, Obama rested the credibility of his presidency on what you might call the Dime Standard. He was flexible about many things, but not this: ‘I will not sign a plan that adds one dime to our deficits—either now or in the future. Period.’”

As Brooks correctly concludes, this means that the more right-wing bill being worked out in the Senate will be the basis of negotiations, since the House bill

does not satisfy the criterion of deficit neutrality.

More significantly, Obama’s speech sets in motion a process that will lead to a raft of right-wing amendments and deeper cost-cutting measures. “Since the Congressional Budget Office is the universally accepted arbiter in such matters, the Democrats will have to produce a bill that the CBO says is deficit-neutral, now and forever,” Brooks writes. “That means there will be a seller’s market for any member of Congress, Republican or Democrat, who has a credible amendment to cut costs. It also means the Democrats will have to scale back coverage and subsidy levels to reach the fiscal targets.”

Thus, more people will be left without any form of insurance and those compelled by law to buy insurance from private companies will have to pay more out-of-pocket.

“Second, the president accepted the principle of capping the tax exemption on employer-provided health benefits,” Brooks continues. Here Brooks refers to Obama’s call in his Wednesday speech for an excise tax on higher-cost plans that would be levied on insurers. As everyone involved in drafting the health care overhaul knows, such fees would be passed on to companies, which would, in turn, either force their employees to pay higher premiums or reduce their coverage.

It is, Brooks notes, “a backdoor and indirect version of the cap... Soon moderates and Republicans will produce amendments to impose a cap directly. These amendments will credibly raise revenue and reduce costs. The administration will now have no principled argument against them.”

The column continues: “Third, the president accepted the principle of tort reform to reduce the cost of defensive medicine.” This “reform” has long been a

demand of the right wing, aimed at crippling the ability of people to seek compensation for medical mistakes and fraud.

“Fourth, the president introduced the public option to its own exclusive Death Panel... On Wednesday, the president praised it, then effectively buried it. White House officials no longer mask their exasperation with the liberal obsession on this issue.”

While the public option was a toothless measure, intended as a benchmark for substandard care, the insurance companies were opposed to it, effectively sealing its fate.

“Fifth, the president also buried the soak-the-rich approach,” i.e., the idea of raising taxes on the wealthy to help pay for health insurance. Instead, Obama will dramatically slash spending on Medicare and Medicaid.

Brooks has particular praise for this aspect of Obama’s speech. “The president underlined his resolve to cut \$500 billion from Medicare and Medicaid. This is a courageous move that moderates appreciate,” he writes.

“Finally,” Brooks concludes, “people in the administration and moderates in Congress would like to beef up ‘game changers.’ These are the wonky but important ideas like bundling hospital payments and increasing price transparency that might lead to a more efficient system down the road.”

These “game changers” are intended to move away from the “fee-for-service” system currently in place, where doctors bill for each service they provide for a patient. Instead, the aim is to pay doctors and hospitals a set fee for a given condition, thereby forcing them to cut back on care.

Here in summary fashion is laid out the right-wing character of the Obama administration’s “reform.” Brooks’ main criticism is that Obama does not go far enough in transforming the health care system. “He has decided to expand the current system, not fix it,” Brooks writes.

In fact, as Brooks’ own column makes clear, Obama’s proposals pave the way for a fundamental attack on health care for the working class, in line with the needs of the financial aristocracy that Obama represents.

Brooks’ column exposes the lies and distortions promoted by the *Nation* magazine and similar publications, which are working to present Obama’s

health care proposals as some sort of progressive social reform.

In a column published the day after Obama’s speech, *Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel wrote, under the headline “Obama Shows His Progressive Spine”: “[I]t was when Obama spoke of Senator Kennedy and the larger moral imperative of healthcare reform that this became a great speech. One for the history books, in fact... In many ways, it was Obama’s fullest, most eloquent and formal defense of liberalism and the clearest exposition of his view of government’s role.”

Outfits like the *Nation* happily swallow what Brooks refers to as Obama’s “chum” (i.e., ground up raw fish used to attract game). Not only do they feed on it; they attempt to repackage it and pass it off to the public as *haute cuisine*. This is their role, and one they perform quite consciously.

A similar function was performed by the *Nation* earlier this year when it worked to promote the “Green Revolution” of Mir Hossein Moussavi in Iran. In that case, it was working on behalf of the interests of American imperialism abroad. With the health care debate, it is doing the same thing for the reactionary social agenda of the American ruling class at home.



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