

US media seeks to legitimize Ryan's extreme-right agenda

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The corporate-controlled US media, both conservative and liberal, has largely praised the selection of Congressman Paul Ryan as the Republican candidate for vice president. In the midst of the worst jobs crisis since the Great Depression, the media has seized on Ryan's selection to insist that the central issue in the elections is not unemployment or poverty, but the deficit.

The response on the right was predictable, given that the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Weekly Standard* and other standard-bearers of ultra-conservative politics had been demanding that the presumptive Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, choose a far-right running mate.

Rupert Murdoch, the proprietor of a publishing empire that includes Fox News, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Post*, gushed on Twitter that Ryan was an "almost perfect choice" and declared, "Now we can choose between Greek and US dream."

Murdoch's enthusiasm is understandable, since the budgets Ryan has drafted for the Republican-controlled House of Representatives would funnel trillions in new tax cuts to the super-rich at the cost of the destruction of Medicare, Medicaid and other social safety net programs.

More revealing is the respectful, even friendly, treatment accorded Ryan by pillars of the liberal media establishment. *Time* magazine headlined its report, "Romney Goes 'Bold'," saying that the Republican nominee had "turned to a rising star whose fiscal vision dazzles the right..." Eight months ago, *Time* named Ryan one of its four runners-up for "Person of the Year" for his role in drafting the 2011 House Republican budget that would privatize Medicare.

The magazine wrote at the time that Ryan had become "the most influential American politician" because he had "managed to harness his party to a

dramatic plan for dealing with America's rapidly rising public debt." It continued: "He brought an ugly issue out of the foggy realm of think tanks and blue-ribbon panels and dropped it into the middle of the national debate in time to define the next presidential election."

Here *Time* reveals the real significance of the Ryan selection, regardless of the effect it has on the outcome of the Romney-Obama contest. Once again, the Republican Party is setting the agenda for the corporate-controlled two-party system, pushing official bourgeois politics further to the right, whoever is inaugurated next January 20.

Even more pernicious is the commentary in the *New York Times*, which sets the agenda for the liberal wing of the US political establishment. The *Times* carried four separate columns Tuesday praising the Ryan selection and portraying it as foreshadowing a turn towards serious debate in the 2012 presidential campaign.

Under the headline, "Saving Private Romney," foreign affairs columnist Roger Cohen wrote that by selecting Ryan, "Romney has provided a spark" and insured a serious political debate "that is no less than the United States deserves."

He continued: "I applaud the Ryan pick because it places front and center what the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Michael Mullen, has called the greatest long-term threat to America's national security: its debt."

Business columnist Joe Nocera hailed the selection of Ryan as "do I dare say this?—good news for lots of people," who would energize both conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats, for opposite reasons. "But, most important, it seems to me that the Ryan pick creates the potential for the country to have the debate, in a national election, that it needs to have

about the size and role of the federal government.”

Nocera praised the vice presidential candidate: “Ryan is, in many ways, the perfect Tea Party standard-bearer. He is likable, engaging, wonkish and smart... What sets him apart is that he is the rare politician who has been willing to put meat on the bones so that everybody can see what he has in mind.”

Liberal columnist Frank Bruni was more critical of the substance of Ryan’s policies, but praised the packaging, writing, “Ryan has precisely the kind of styling and clearly defined brand that Romney lacks. It’s striking... What Romney stands to gain most from him isn’t a swing state or two. It’s driving lessons.”

Ross Douthat, one of the conservative pundits in the *Times* stable, completed the foursome, with a blog posting headlined “Why Moderates Should Like Paul Ryan” that was even more effusive than the commentaries of Cohen and Nocera.

Douthat claimed that Ryan had rebuffed those in his own congressional caucus who had opposed offering any alternative to the \$700 billion in Medicare cuts incorporated into Obama’s health care legislation—cuts the Republicans claimed to oppose in the course of their demagogic campaign in the 2010 elections. Ryan not only pushed through his own far-reaching Medicare privatization scheme, he offered a plan for Social Security “reform” (i.e., privatization and benefit cuts) which his own party decided not to embrace, at least until after the next election.

“To the extent that there is a plausible Republican response to the Obama agenda, he’s the biggest reason it exists,” Douthat added, concluding, “As a presidential candidate, Romney picked his running mate the way he probably made hiring decisions as a businessman. Out of an array of qualified applicants, he picked the man who’s done the most impressive and important work.”

What all of these journalistic paeans evade is an honest presentation of the impact the House Republican budgets drafted by Ryan would have on working people in the United States. The proposals advanced by Ryan would wipe out social programs on which tens of millions depend: nearly 50 million on Medicare, an equal number on Medicaid, and millions more for whom food stamps, home heating assistance and other programs are the difference between subsistence and destitution.

On Medicaid alone, for example, the Ryan plan called for \$700 billion in cuts over the next decade, which would require, according to a Kaiser Foundation analysis, throwing 14 to 19 million people off the program, many of them children. Ryan’s pledge to impose a ceiling of 3.75 percent of gross domestic product for all domestic non-entitlement spending would require a 92 percent reduction in programs ranging from education and housing to mass transportation and environmental cleanup.

While these draconian measures would be applied to public social spending, the Ryan plan calls for another \$5 trillion in additional tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations, on top of extending the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy that are now scheduled to expire on December 31.

In the avalanche of commentary and coverage since the Ryan selection was announced Saturday, very little notice has been taken of the many similarities between the Obama health care program and Ryan’s program for the privatization of Medicare. Both center on the use of state-run exchanges in which individuals buy private insurance with government-issued vouchers.

This mechanism serves two purposes: guaranteeing a vast and profitable captive market for the giant insurance companies and placing a ceiling on the amount the federal government spends on health care, shifting the costs and risks to individual families.

While the media—and the Obama and Romney campaigns—claim the Ryan selection means a substantive debate over social policy, the reality is that there is no significant difference. Both factions of the capitalist political establishment agree that spending on Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other social programs must be drastically slashed, and both embrace the perspective that the working class must pay for the crisis of American capitalism.



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