

Obamacare and the “crisis” of an aging population

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The inauguration of the private health care exchanges as part of the Affordable Care Act this past month has set off a political crisis for the Obama administration. Underlying the immediate issue of the failure of the new web site is the character of Obamacare itself—an attack on health care cloaked in the guise of “reform,” whose basic aim is to slash health care spending and shift a greater cost burden onto the backs of individuals.

From the beginning, cutting health care spending has been the central motivation of discussions over the Obama administration’s main domestic initiative. This was to be done by requiring individuals to purchase private insurance or face a penalty, thereby allowing corporations and governments to eliminate their own health care programs and leave individuals at the mercy of private insurers’ profit interests. Just as the health care overhaul goes into effect, bipartisan discussions are underway to slash hundreds of billions more from Medicare and Social Security.

Underlying the entire discussion in the political establishment is a basic concern of the American ruling class, a concern that is generally left unstated—namely, that people in the end are simply living too long. The advances of modern medicine have extended lives, often significantly beyond the age of retirement.

For the political strategists of the corporate and financial elite, these years of retirement and medical care are not seen as a good, but as a source of costs that must be slashed, so that they can take that money. This is to be accomplished either by raising the retirement age, by lowering life expectancy so that people die earlier, or both.

Two recent policy papers from the Center for Strategic & International Studies, a Washington-based think tank with close ties to the US military-

intelligence agencies and both big business parties, give a sense of the discussions taking place behind the scenes.

One paper, “The Global Aging Preparedness Index” (GAP Index), examines the impact of the “stunning demographic transformation” caused by rising lifespans in the US and internationally. The second paper, “The Budget Crisis and the Civil-Military Challenge to National Security Spending,” is written by Anthony H. Cordesman, a longtime CSIS strategist who acts as a consultant for the US State and Defense departments.

The first study states that the US would rate much higher on the “GAP Index” if not for the “extraordinarily rapid rate of growth in health-care spending”, particularly for the aging population. The authors divide the older population into two categories: “young elderly,” ages 60-69, and “old elderly,” 70 and beyond. They maintain that because people are living longer, the “young elderly” are not truly “old age” and should not be allowed to retire “early” and bilk the system.

The solution? Raise the retirement age for Social Security—and, by implication, eligibility for Medicare—and force these supposedly “young elderly” to continue working. The Obama administration has indicated its support for such measures, which are part of the ongoing discussion between the two parties in Washington.

To bolster their argument, the CSIS authors helpfully suggest that working into old age “is not only good for the health of the budget and the economy, but according to most gerontologists it is also good for the health of the elderly themselves.” The modern-day phenomenon of elderly workers competing for minimum-wage jobs because their pensions have been slashed or eliminated turns out to be...a boon to good

health.

In his paper, written from the standpoint of the military-intelligence apparatus, Cordesman states: “The US does not face any foreign threat as serious as its failure to come to grips with...the rise in the cost of federal entitlement spending.” He argues that the growth of the federal deficit and debt are driven “almost exclusively by the rise in federal spending on major health care programs, Social Security, and cost of net interest on the debt.”

Cordesman bemoans that as the population grows older, seniors are sapping vital resources as they seek treatment for dementia, heart disease, and cancer. By implication, something must be done to rein this in, especially if the United States is to address Cordesman’s main priority—maintaining the current exorbitant spending on wars and the US military.

Both documents claim that the great divide in society is between the “young” and the “old,” and that by swallowing up a disproportionate share of the national wealth, the elderly are placing the younger generation in danger.

This is a cynical lie. The central danger to American society is the capitalist system, which entails the unrestrained plundering of the working class by a narrow and parasitic ruling elite whose escalating wealth and campaigns of military aggression are bleeding society white.

The elderly, the vast majority of whom struggle to survive on Social Security and dwindling retirement accounts, are denounced as leeches on society, while the wealth of the super-rich grows to unprecedented levels. Though the combined pay of the top 10 highest paid CEOs in the US was \$4.7 billion last year alone, the representatives of the ruling class demand that workers’ retirement age be raised and health care spending slashed.

It is such considerations that underlie Obamacare and the broader framework of the health care “debate,” aimed at setting up an even more heavily class-based system, in which most people receive substandard care while the rich can afford the most modern medicines and procedures.

And it is such considerations that have motivated the campaign from the news media, and particularly the *New York Times*, to restrict supposedly “unnecessary” medical treatment for ordinary people.

That the representatives of the corporate and financial elite see the growth in life expectancy and improved health in old age—standard measures of an advancing society—as a positive evil is in itself a damning indictment of their policies and of the capitalist system that they defend.



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