

Beating the Boomers



Why Bush and Co. Are Racing to Cut Social Security

BY DAVE LINDORFF

SOCIAL SECURITY, THE NEW DEAL program that has provided a basic level of economic support for the nation's elderly, disabled and orphaned for 70 years, is in grave danger—not from Baby Boomers' rising demands, but from a campaign of lies and fear-mongering, led by the president.

The truth? There is no Social Security crisis. None whatsoever.

Yet, in his State of the Union address, President Bush put the campaign to destroy Social Security—and its promise of security for the aged and disabled—front and center, claiming that the system founded in 1935 is headed for bankruptcy in 2042.

Like the mythical weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, this was a flat-out lie. First of all, even if the date were correct, all that would happen in 2042 would be that the trust fund used to pay out benefits to workers would be exhausted. Even then, current workers' taxes would continue to cover 73 percent of promised benefits to retirees.

More importantly, that 2042 projection by the increasingly politicized Social Security Administration was a conservative projection made a few years ago based upon unreasonably low estimates of future economic growth. It has already been pushed back by several years of good economic performance. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office and most independent economists say that the trust fund should enable the system to cover all benefits through at least 2052 and perhaps through 2080 and beyond. And here's something the president has not told people: If the cap on income subject to Social Security taxation—currently set at \$90,000 in wages—was eliminated so that all income was subject to the

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tax, there would be no shortfall in the trust fund—not in 2042, not in 2075, never.

But the most crucial fact that the president and right-wing critics of Social Security have failed to mention is that, by 2045, nearly all of the Baby Boom generation will have already shuffled off this mortal coil, taking their oversized claims for benefits with them.

Retirement policies

Given that there is no crisis, why are the president, right-wing politicians and pundits, corporate leaders, business organizations—and the media—all calling for “reforms” to “save” the system? They understand that the Baby Boom generation, as it approaches retirement, poses a crisis—not for Social Security, but for their political agenda. They know that if they can effectively kill off the program before it becomes a core Boomer issue, it will be much harder to reestablish it.

Consider this: Just as there will be nearly twice as many elderly retirees collecting benefits when the wave of Americans born between 1945 and 1960 hits its retirement age peak (the first Boomers start retiring in 2011), there will also be twice as many elderly voters. While today’s seniors came of age listening to Perry Como in the politically

quiescent ’50s, tomorrow’s retirees will be people who listened to Bob Dylan and cut their political teeth on the civil rights and antiwar movements of the ’60s and ’70s.

In a few years, we can expect to see an unprecedentedly large senior lobby that knows how to organize, and how to take it to the streets and fight hard when its own interests are at stake. Once they near retirement, this powerful voting bloc will see Social Security

of the environment and about global warming. They’re worried about 2010 and the senior revolution that is around the corner.

Today, people over 65, as powerful an electoral bloc as they are, represent only 17 percent of the voting age population. By 2025, when the bulk of Baby Boomers will be in the 65–80 age bracket, retirees will represent 25 percent of the voting-age population, an increase of 45 percent in their relative voting power. If

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and Medicare as their number one political issue. If Social Security is already the “third rail” of electoral politics, not to be touched, in a few years, it will become the Molotov cocktail, exploding the political status quo.

Corporate America knows this. The people in the boardrooms and the conservative think tanks aren’t worried about 2042. They don’t think that long-term. If they did, they wouldn’t be so cavalier about the destruction

those aged 55 to 64 are added into the equation—a reasonable assumption, since people who reach 55 are starting to think about their retirement and tend to vote more in line with the interests of actual retirees—the elderly and near-elderly will represent 40 percent of the electorate.

The right talks ominously of a generational conflict between older retirees collecting pensions *Continued on page 29*



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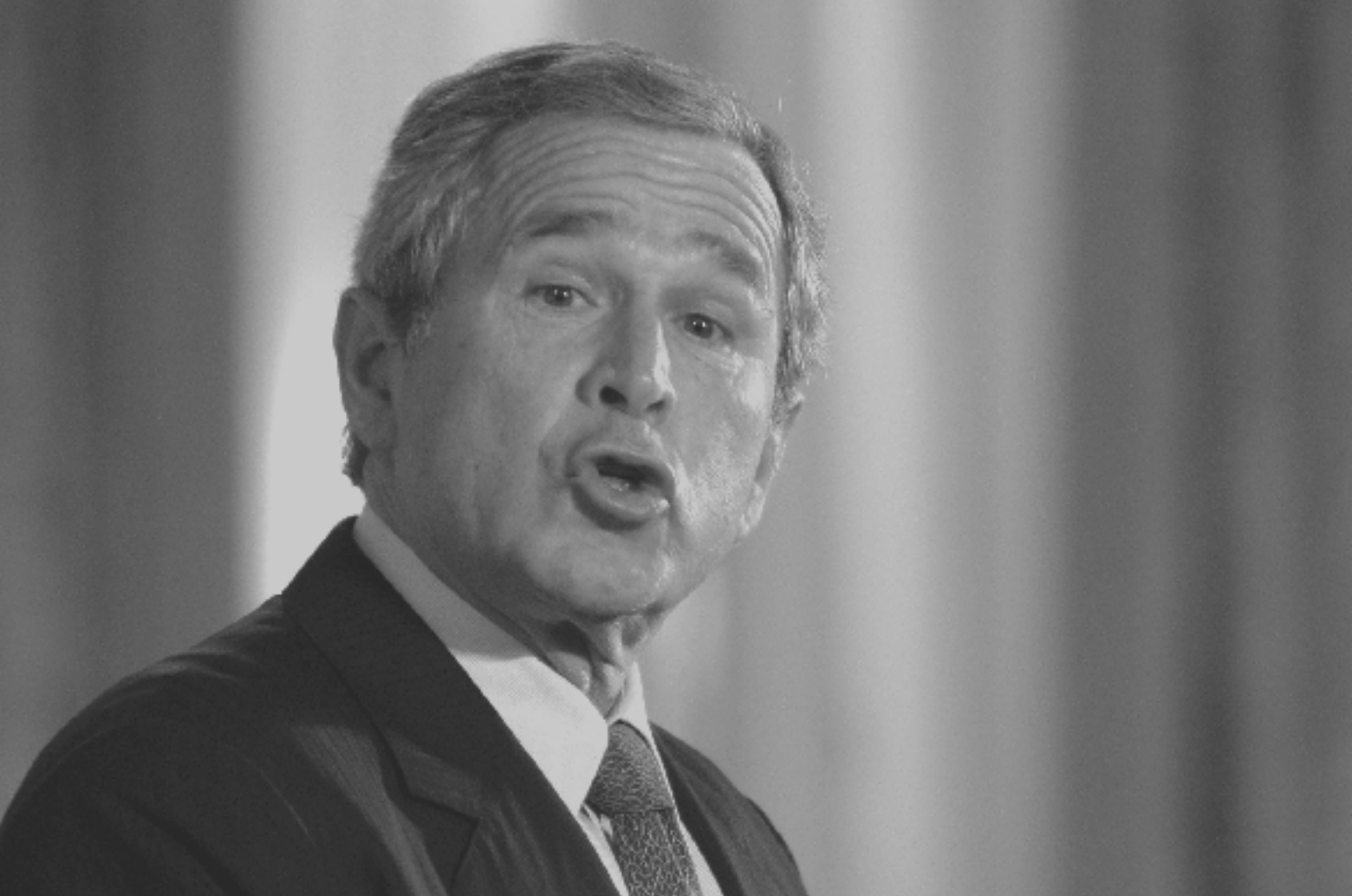
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The Not-So-Quiet American

BY SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

THE IRAQI ELECTIONS APPEAR TO authenticate the statement George W. Bush made in his January inauguration speech: “America will not pretend that jailed dissidents prefer their chains or that women welcome humiliation and servitude.”

It is difficult to disagree with Bush here: He effectively did touch the Achilles’ heel of many Western progressives, who were often disarmed by the one good argument, repeatedly evoked by Christopher Hitch-

ens, *for the war against Iraq*: The majority of Iraqis were Saddam’s victims, and they would be really glad to get rid of him. He was such a catastrophe for his country that an American occupation in whatever form would be preferable to them in terms of daily survival and much lower levels of fear. We are not talking here of “bringing Western democracy to Iraq,” but of simply getting rid of the nightmare called Saddam. To this majority, the caution expressed by Western liberals can only appear deeply

hypocritical—do they really care about how the Iraqi people feel?

Why, then, does the old story repeat itself in Iraq? America brings new hope and democracy to people, but instead of hailing the U.S. Army, the ungrateful people do not want it. They look the proverbial gift horse in the mouth, and America then responds like a sullen child in reaction to the ingratitude of those it selflessly helped.

With the global American ideological offensive, the fundamental insight of Graham