

# BUSH'S BITTER DEAL

BY THE EDITORS OF THE PROGRESSIVE

"Narrow partisanship, and poisonous national suspicions and animosities, can defeat the will of a majority of intelligent Americans and do injury to the best interests of the nation and the world."

—ALLAN NEVINS

"How can this be happening in America? How can people like this be in charge of our country? If I didn't see it with my own eyes, I'd think I was hallucinating."

—PHILIP ROTH  
("The Plot Against America")

By now, the contours of the next four years are clear. George W. Bush, emboldened by his reelection and suffering from the delusion that God is taking him by the hand, has set his sights on more military interventions abroad and more destructiveness at home.

He believes the primary functions of government are to wage war, to fatten the wallets of the rich, and to maximize the profits of corporations. On the home front, he is determined to knock down one of the last pillars of the New Deal by privatizing Social Security. Not for him the promoting of the general welfare. Leave those duties to the churches.

He is a true believer of the Republican cause: to delegitimize government as a force for social good, and to throw the American people to the wolves of the market.

One of the most ridiculous passages in Bush's State of the Union address was when he talked about "restraining the spending appetite of the federal government."

He's one to talk. He's been spending on war like there's no tomorrow.

He has sunk the deficit to \$427 billion this year, and then he vows to make "tax relief" permanent, which means the rich are going to be able to skate away with loads more cash than otherwise would go to the Treasury.

So who is Bush to praise "the bipartisan enthusiasm for spending discipline?"

But there's method to his madness.

Bush actually likes the deficit. It gives him an excuse to eviscerate any social program he doesn't like.

And so, having sunk the deficit to ear-popping lows, Bush now says there's no money left in the cupboard for solving our domestic problems.

Thus he pledges to hold the "growth of discretionary spending below inflation."

He's cutting way back on food stamps, Medicaid, prescription drugs for veterans, and on money that goes to housing and heating for the poor. And he is taking the axe to the \$637 million Community Development Block Grants program, which provides "a wide range of housing, nutrition, education, and employment services to low income people," as *The New York Times* notes.

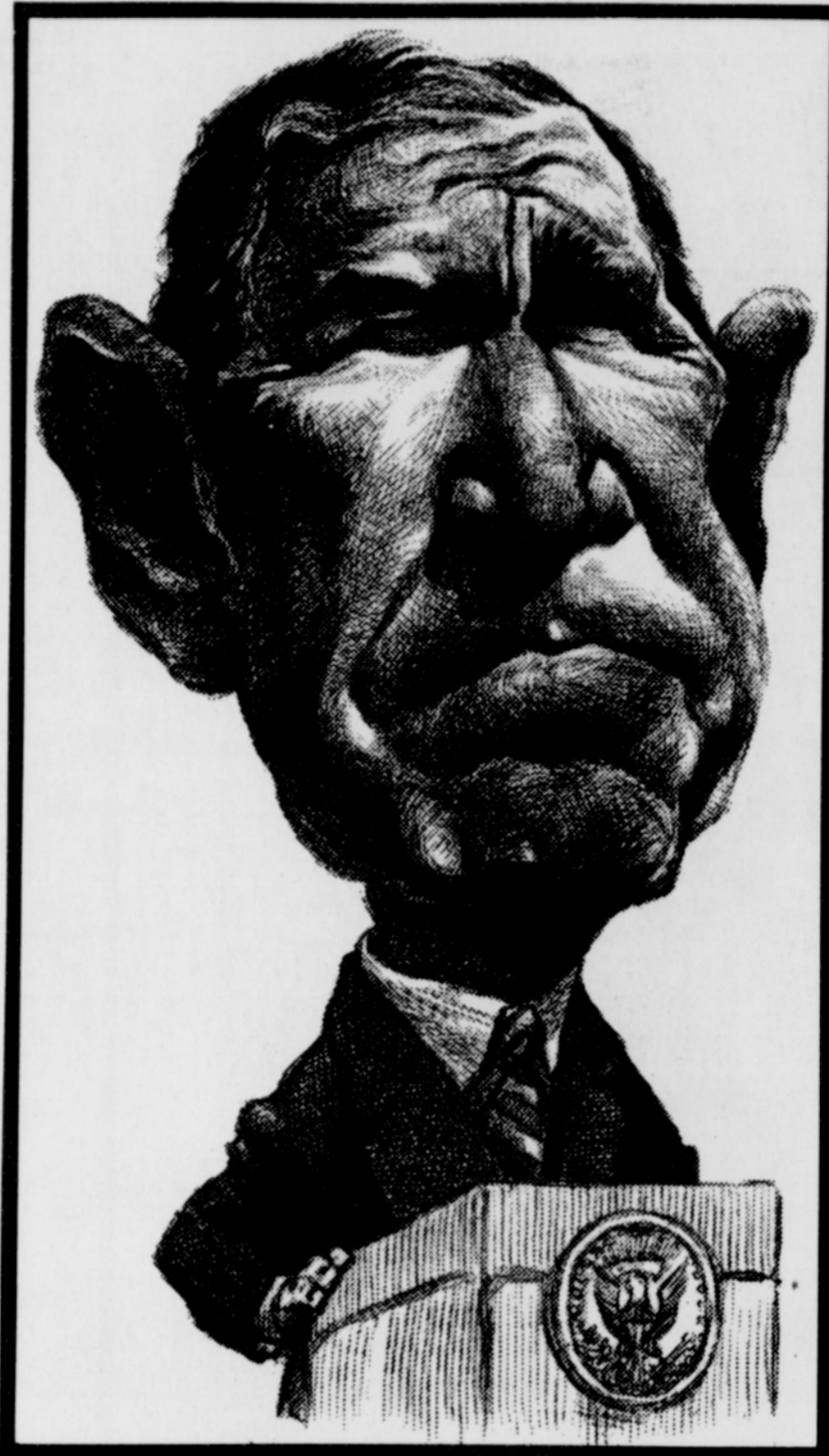
"A cut of this magnitude will force communities to close youth centers, curtail neighborhood revitalization programs, help fewer elderly homeowners stay in their homes, leave poor neighborhoods without water and sewer services, and reduce or eliminate a host of other activities," says Sheila Crowley, president of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. "What is truly insulting is that these communities are being asked to sacrifice to help reduce the federal deficit when wealthy Americans are enjoying the tax cuts that fueled the deficit and sacrificing nothing."

We've got 35 million people living in poverty in the United States, and homeless shelters are turning away people for lack of beds. Ten million people — many of them kids — aren't getting enough to eat. And all Bush is going to do is make their lives more miserable.

The National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce have their man in the White House. He used his State of the Union not to advocate raising the minimum wage, which has been \$5.15 an hour for more than seven years now, but to rail against "needless regulation" and "junk lawsuits" and "irresponsible class actions" and "frivolous asbestos claims." He also promised a "pro-growth" tax code, which is sure to be less progressive than the current one.

His assault on Social Security is perfectly in keeping with his ruthless ideology. For decades, he has opposed this program, and now that he's got the power, he wants to gut it, though he strenuously denied any plans to privatize it during the Presidential campaign. But what's another lie?

And as he did in his preparation for war against Iraq, so he is doing now with Social Security: He is creating a false



RON CODDINGTON

crisis. According to a new Congressional Budget Office report, Social Security is fully solvent to the year 2052.

Bush, with his usual fearmongering, ignored that fact. "In the year 2027," he said in his State of the Union, "the government will somehow have to come up with an extra \$200 billion to keep the system afloat."

That's nonsense. The Social Security Trust Fund will still be in surplus at that time, the money safely invested in government bonds, according to the trustees.

It is Bush's privatization plan that will bankrupt Social Security. It will drain hundreds of billions of dollars out of the trust fund in the next ten years.

With a little tinkering, like raising the ceiling on the amount that the wealthy pay in Social Security taxes (Bill Gates pays the same amount as a middle manager making \$90,000 a year), Social Security could be safeguarded indefinitely.

And even if the government did absolutely nothing, Social Security would still be able to pay 78% of benefits after 2052.

That's a lot more than Bush would be paying with his plan, which would cut benefits by as much as 40% for younger people whom he claims to be championing.

He made it crystal clear that if you are under 55, you can forget about a secure Social Security check that guarantees to the next generation the same level of benefits that the elderly and the disabled are getting today.

And what happens to people who are disabled under 55 today? More than six million people with disabilities are in that age group; and they are currently on Social Security. Not until a mother with a disabled child confronted the President at a public forum in Fargo (North Dakota) did he aver the he would not change the benefits for the disabled, though he hasn't released the fine print on that.

Bush's Social Security plan is a boon for Democrats and progressives. It puts into starkest relief two vastly different visions of what our government should do: Should government ensure that the elderly and disabled have a decent floor of monthly income, or should everyone under 55 have to play the roulette wheel on Wall Street?

Social Security is an immensely popular program, with 47 million Americans reliably receiving their monthly checks in the mail. For those 65 and over, Social Security provides 58% of their income. Without it, a huge chunk of those people would fall into poverty.

For once, Democrats have come out strongly in opposition to Bush's plan, even stirring up the courage for a few catcalls during Bush's address to Congress. With the support of unions, women's groups, the American Association of Retired Persons, disability rights groups, and others who remain committed to this program, Democrats ought to be able to hold the line against Bush. If they do so, they should be able to gain ground against the Republicans in 2006 and finally put a brake on the runaway train that is the Bush Administration.

Nowhere is that train more dangerous than in foreign policy. Both in his inaugural address and in his State of the Union, Bush spoke in the crusading language that he's so fond of, saying his goal was "ending tyranny in our world."

But Bush supports tyrants around the world: from Equatorial Guinea to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Egypt all the way to Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. And the Bush Administration has eagerly fomented coups against democratically elected governments in Haiti and Venezuela.

Bush is not one to let annoying facts get in the way of lofty rhetoric. "Because we have acted in the great liberating

tradition of this nation, tens of millions have achieved their freedom," he said. "By our efforts, we have lit a fire as well — a fire in the minds of men."

In a creepy way, Bush fell in love with the fire metaphor. Early in his inaugural address, he alluded to 9/11 as "a day of fire." But later he described a different fire, the fire of liberty. "It warms those who feel its power," he said, "it burns those who fight its progress, and one day this untamed fire of freedom will reach the darkest corners of our world."

Taken literally, Bush wants to incinerate his opponents.

In a megalomaniacal fashion, Bush boasted of being the champion of all oppressed people everywhere. "America's influence is not unlimited, but fortunately for the oppressed, America's influence is considerable," he said, "and we will use it confidently in freedom's cause."

He set the country on a worldwide crusade, though this time he was prudent enough not to use the word. "All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know: The United States will not ignore your oppression, or excuse your oppressors." And he warned "the rulers of outlaw regimes" that their days were numbered.

This was more than a murmur of war. It was a war cry. In his State of the Union speech, he made clear who the most likely targets are: Syria and Iran.

"To promote peace in the broader Middle East, we must confront regimes that continue to harbor terrorists and pursue weapons of mass murder," he said. He demanded that Syria "end all support for terror and open the door to freedom." And he called Iran "the world's primary state sponsor of terror, pursuing nuclear weapons while depriving its people of freedom."

When Bush (and Vice President Dick Cheney, for that matter) used similar language about Iraq, some people didn't take it seriously; in fact, it was the rattle of the snake. So it may be this time.

Bush made only passing reference to North Korea. As a result, Kim Jong-Il may be able to sleep better now, but not the people of Damascus and Tehran.

As for Iraq, Bush disabused anyone who thought he might use the recent elections as a convenient fig leaf for getting out of Iraq.

"We will not set an artificial timetable for leaving Iraq, because that would embolden the terrorists and make them believe they can wait us out," he said. "We are in Iraq to achieve a result: A country that is democratic, representative of all its people, at peace with its neighbors, and able to defend itself. And when that result is achieved, our men and women serving in Iraq will return home with the honor they have earned."

He all but added: and not a day sooner.

Bush will keep the troops there for the long haul, in part because he believes he's on a mission from God.

In his inaugural, he said God is "the Author of Liberty." And Bush sees himself therefore as God's literary agent. The goal of the United States, says Bush, is to extend liberty and that's God's goal, too, so the two are working in tandem.

Or, as he put it illogically at the end of his State of the Union address, "The road of Providence is uneven and unpredictable, yet we know where it leads: It leads to freedom."

But if the road is unpredictable, how does Bush know where it leads?

The day after his inauguration, Bush attended a National Prayer Service, presided over by the Reverend Billy Graham. Said Bush, using the same line from his speech at the Republican Convention, "We have a calling from beyond the stars to stand for freedom."

For his part, the Reverend Graham said, "Our Father, we acknowledge your divine help in the selection of our nation's leaders throughout our history. And we believe that in your providence, you've granted a second term of office for our President George W. Bush, and our Vice President Richard Cheney."

This is heady stuff. And when you believe you're driving God's car, and when you believe He's giving you global positioning, and you believe He's right there in the backseat blurring out directions, you don't care so much if you run people over in the process, lots of people, even your own people.

You're just doing what He wants, and He is all knowing. George Bush is an extraordinarily dangerous President, perhaps the most dangerous one in the history of the republic, with the exception of Richard Nixon. Bush disdains civil liberties, he countenances torture, he holds himself above the laws of Congress and the treaties the United States is a party to, he has no appreciation for the environment, he fuels bigotry against gays and lesbians, he is hostile to women's reproductive freedom, he is an enemy of organized labor, he is intent on rolling back not just the New Deal but Progressive Era reforms as well, and he has set this country on a course of war, endless war.

He acts unrestrained. It is up to Congress and the courts — and to all of us, nonviolently — to restrain him.



**Bach'n Rock**

RECORD & TAPE SHOP

POPULAR MUSIC FROM THE 17TH TO 21ST CENTURY

& ALLEY CAT ESPRESSO

389 12TH ST. ASTORIA 3338-6376

MUSIC NON-PROFIT TO THE

SPAY & NEUTER HUMANE ASSOCIATION

**Old Town Framing Co.**

1287 COMMERCIAL ST.  
ASTORIA 325-5221