

The Big Lie of Recession Politics: ‘Shared Sacrifice’

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Global Research, March 03, 2009

3 March 2009

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

It’s everywhere you look and in every speech you listen to. Every time a politician or businessmen talks about the recession, an almost in-synch, repetitive mantra can be heard: “Shared sacrifice, equality of sacrifice, hard choices.” Oh my.

There must be something to it, since EVERYBODY seems to be regurgitating the phrase in harmony. Even union bureaucrats have caught the shared sacrifice fever, using it to subdue their members in contract negotiations.

Obama himself has turned this once-extinct phrase into the linchpin of his economics policy: “We will, each and every one of us, have to compromise on certain things we care about but which we simply cannot afford right now.”

Obama has used this reasoning to reduce the wages of auto workers, while also talking about so-called “entitlement programs” like social security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

When asked about how this applied to the 28 new helicopters planned for the White House — costing \$11.2 billion — Obama gave a heroic lead to the American people, saying that he “could do without them.”

Likewise, corporate CEO’s are being asked to give up their corporate jets, and they too are making brave sacrifices.

Examples like these are then shown to workers, who are told to share in the sacrifices, since “these are hard times.”

The worker, however, isn’t immediately sold on the idea. Haven’t wages and benefits gone down for decades, while the workload has gone up? Are these not sacrifices?

“No,” we are told, “this is a deep recession, and if you do not agree to work for less, the company will fail and you will lose your job.”

This scare tactic IS effective. And conversations like these are taking place all over the country in an attempt to scare workers into submission.

The phenomenon of shared sacrifice is equally infectious to public workers, becoming immediately relevant because of the budget crises affecting nearly every state. The Governor of Oregon, in preparing to unveil his anti-worker budget proposal, first announced a pay cut for himself and thousands of state managers.

The next step, of course, was asking public workers to share in the sacrifices being made.

The difference between the two, however, is that the Governor and the bosses make significantly more than workers, and while the Governor might enjoy a bit less luxury in his life, the workers may have to forego daycare for their children, or paying the electric bill.

The point is that workers need sacrifice nothing. The last “boom” of the economy was based not only on fantasy prices for homes, but the cheap price of labor. During the boom the working class resorted to ever-more debt to maintain their standard of living, while the rich got richer than anyone had ever dreamed possible.

It is the rich and corporations who now need to sacrifice, and the rest of us who need to demand it. Taxes for the rich need to be raised substantially. Now!

Otherwise, the wages and benefits of workers, not to mention benefits for the unemployed, elderly and disabled will go down instead.

The solution is commonsense, but the corporate two-party system functions not on sense but on subservience to powerful interests. Naming these powerful interests and organizing around the demand that they pay for the recession is the task of the day.

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