

# Headline English

2011, week 39 *Learn English through reading on current world affairs*

## 1 **Class war in America?**

2 original at

3 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/sep/19/class-war-america-republicans-rich>

4 Taking his cue from Warren Buffett, President Obama has announced a  
5 'millionaire tax' as part of his budget plan. Republicans and conservatives  
6 always fight back against proposals to raise taxes on corporations and rich  
7 individuals by making two basic claims. First, such proposals amount to  
8 un-American "class warfare", pitting the working class against  
9 corporations and the rich. Second, such proposals would take money for  
10 the government that would otherwise have been invested in production  
11 and thus created jobs.

12 Neither logic nor evidence supports either claim. The charge of class war  
13 is particularly obtuse. Consider simply these two facts. First, at the end of  
14 the second world war, for every dollar Washington raised in taxes on  
15 individuals, it raised \$1.50 in taxes on business profits. Today, that ratio is  
16 very different: for every dollar Washington gets in taxes on individuals, it  
17 takes 25 cents in taxes on business. In short, the last half century has  
18 seen a massive shift of the burden of federal taxation off business and  
19 onto individuals.

20 Second, across those 50 years, the actual shift that occurred was the  
21 opposite of the much more modest reversal proposed this week by  
22 President Obama; over the same period, the federal income tax rate on  
23 the richest individuals fell from 91% to the current 35%. Yet, Republicans  
24 and conservatives use the term "class war" for what Obama proposes –  
25 and never for what the last five decades have accomplished in shifting the  
26 tax burden from the rich and corporations to the working class.

27 The tax structure imposed by Washington on the US over the last half-  
28 century has seen a massive double shift of the burden of taxation: from  
29 corporations to individuals and from the richest individuals to everyone  
30 else.

31 If the national debate wants seriously to use a term like "class war" to  
32 describe Washington's tax policies, then the reality is that the class war's  
33 winners have been corporations and the rich.

## Questions

- 1) Who has, according to the text, inspired Mr Obama to consider a special tax on the rich?
- 2) What are, according to the article, the two assumptions based on which Republicans oppose the special tax proposed by Mr Obama?
- 3) Does the text consider the Republican claims justified?
- 4) What has, according to the text, happened in the US between the end of World War Two and the present day with regard to where tax revenue comes from?
- 5) What has, according to the text, happened in the US between the end of World War Two and the present day with regard to the tax rate for the richest income bracket?
- 6) What is the conclusion that the text makes?
- 7) Do you think that given the current economic situation, we need an increase in taxes for the rich? Or do you think that there are economic arguments to the contrary?

## Vocabulary

**claim** (line 7) – a statement or assertion

**charge** (line 12) – attack, reproach, blame

**shift** (line 18) – a change, transformation or modification

**burden** (line 28) – a load or an obligation; generally something which is borne with difficulty

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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