

Disintegrating Economic Recovery

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The word 'recover' always has the connotation of "getting back." But who is going to get back what when the economy "recovers"? Few at most. So what does an economic recovery look like? No one knows. The word 'recovery' can not be applied to objects willy-nilly. A sick person goes into the hospital to recover; a broken automobile is taken to a shop to be repaired. Automobiles do not recover. Neither do economies; they can only get better or worse, and specific information is needed to determine which. Few people realize just how close to the edge of disintegration America is. The Congress meets for one purpose and one purpose alone—to get reelected. The political posturing begins the day after each election, while the nation's problems go unaddressed, and our media aid and abet the posturing. Such is America today. This recession/depression will never "recover." Neither will America.

That successful, inveterate liars consistently use a specific group of practices has been known for ages. They, for instance, give long winded answers to questions to distract and confuse the questioner, make assertions that can't be easily refuted, and keep from saying very much that is specific, making it difficult to confirm or refute details. One prevalent way of doing this is to speak metaphorically.

Those of you old enough to remember the Vietnamese War may remember that whenever General Westmorland was asked how the war was going, he usually replied that there was "light at the end of the tunnel"

Of course there was; there is light at both ends of every tunnel. But no one ever knew which end he was talking about or if we were getting any closer to the end that would get us out. We all now know, of course, that we were not. Telling us that there was light at the end of the tunnel told us nothing at all; yet many were led to believe that "there is light at the end of the tunnel" was synonymous with "we were getting closer to victory" even though there is absolutely no logical relationship between these two assertions. Why did Westmorland always answer this way? The only reasonable answer is to avoid telling the truth.

Likewise, President Obama is addicted to vapid metaphors: the US still has a "big hole to fill," "Headwinds" from the first half of 2011 are holding back the recovery," "There are going to be bumps in the road," and "on the right track"

The hole that needs to be filled is the lack of specificity in his speeches, but let's just consider the ubiquitous "on the right track." It's very similar to "light at the end of the tunnel." A train, for instance, can be on the right track but be going nowhere or perhaps even going backwards. When a train is on a siding, isn't it on the right track? What does this metaphor tell anyone? What kind of evidence could be cited to refute it? It's one of those perfectly safe, empty claims that people trying to hoodwink others make all the time.

But what has all of this to do with “recovery”? Well, just take a look at how the word is ordinarily used.

“My neighbor has recovered from pneumonia” usually means his previously impaired lungs are now working normally. They have gotten their normal functionality back.

“The police have recovered my friend’s stolen property” usually means that his property has been returned to him. He has gotten his property back.

“The speculator recovered the money he lost” means that he got the amount of money he lost back.

The word ‘recover’ always has the connotation of “getting back.”

But who is going to get back what when the economy “recovers”? Are the people who lost their homes going to get them back? No. Are the people who lost their jobs going to get them back? Not likely. Are the people who lost their savings for retirement going to get them back? Some may; most will not.

So what does an economic recovery look like? No one knows.

If the employed population rises to 94%, will the economy have recovered? What if the workers’ total compensation is only half of what it was before the recession/depression? Will it still be a recovery?

What if GNP exceeds the GNP before the downturn but employment only rises to 85%? Will that be a recovery?

What if the Dow goes to 50,000 but the average wage is only \$4.00 and people are starving? Will that be a recovery?

You see, the word ‘recovery’ when used in relation to the economy is just another vapid metaphor. It means nothing. It means whatever anyone wants it to mean. It is not used to describe anything real or concrete. It is used to pull the wool over people’s eyes, to get them to believe what the speaker wants them to believe. If he wanted to tell you the truth, he’d use more specific words, such as, “a few more people are employed today than a month ago.” “The Dow is somewhat higher today than it was last quarter.” “The average wage is \$5.00 less today than it was last year.” If anyone ignores the last of these, he could say the economy is recovering. But could he say that if he takes the third into consideration?

The word ‘recovery’ cannot be applied to objects willy-nilly. A sick person goes into the hospital to recover; a broken automobile is taken to a shop to be repaired. Automobiles do not recover. A diseased tree can be treated and recover; a broken stone cannot. An erroneous calculation can be corrected; it cannot recover. Neither can economies; they can only get better or worse, and specific information is needed to determine which.

When people don’t want you to know the truth or even what, if anything, they’re talking about, they use abstract words and metaphors. Looking carefully at the words people use is a sure way of identifying scoundrels. I am no oracle; I don’t have the slightest idea of what the President is up to. But I do know he’s not being honest with the American people.

Neither are the members of his Cabinet or even the Congress.

Few people seem to realize just how close to the edge of disintegration America is. Engineers have been warning us for decades about our collapsing infrastructure. This year's floods have demonstrated just how fragile our earthen dikes are. We have chosen the inefficient automobile as our basic means of transportation, but we lack the money to maintain our highways. Mr. Obama has recently spoken of building bullet trains while even our present railway system is slow and unsafe as two fatal accidents this week alone show. The war on drugs has been a monumental failure; yet we persist on fighting it. Even Congressmen admit that our government does not work.

The President last year initiated a "race to the top" in our public schools; today teachers are being laid off for lack of funding. Up until 2008, many people had lost confidence in all of our institutions except the financial system, but even that confidence has now evaporated. Given the number of people Americans have incarcerated, this nation must be either the most crime ridden the world has ever seen or the most repressed. Homeland Security has done little but annoy people; yet it refuses to change its policies. Two years ago, the Democrats enacted a comprehensive health care bill; today the talk is about reducing its benefits. Our once mighty manufacturing base has been dismantled; yet the government wants more free trade agreements to increase exports. State governments are too impoverished to continue providing even basic services. The number of homeless, impoverished, and hungry Americans is increasing. The number of employed along with their wages is declining. Our superbly equipped and trained military forces have not won a major war since World War II; yet we continually engage them. I suspect the greatest contributor to GNP is political contributions, sanctioned by the Supreme Court, made to buy off our representatives. The Congress meets for one purpose and one purpose alone—to get reelected. The political posturing begins the day after each election, while the nation's problems go unaddressed, and our media aid and abet the posturing. Such is America today. This recession/depression will never "recover." Neither will America.

John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who writes on social, political, and economic issues. After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, he spent 20 years as a university professor and another 20 years working as a writer. He has published a textbook in formal logic commercially, in academic journals and a small number of commercial magazines, and has written a number of guest editorials for newspapers. His on-line pieces can be found on <http://www.jkozy.com/> and he can be emailed from that site's homepage.

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