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OPINION

The Roaring Twenties Are Back

Economy is reverting to the bad old days

BY WILLIAM A. COLLINS

Many of us who have reached Social Security age had a pretty good run.

We lived through those heady days that followed the Great Depression and World War II, a delightful — though brief — moment in U.S. history when the rich were losing the class war. The middle class gained the high ground and nearly everyone had a shot at a decent income and reasonable retirement. There was plenty of work, and we even started caring for the poor.



No longer. The class war's over and the rich won. The U.S. economy is reverting to the bad old days of a century ago.

Wealth and income for the most privileged among us are booming once again, and they're paying a smaller share in taxes. CEO pay has become obscene, production jobs have been sent abroad or lost to automation, pensions are rarely guaranteed, health care is unaffordable, student debt and home mortgages are often unpayable, and median family income is sinking like a stone.

One visible sign of the war's aftermath is that segregation — including by class — is on

the rise.

The rich are securing hot spots to live in and fencing them off. Manhattan (following London, Paris, and Dubai) is alive with projects for the ultra-rich — who of course only live there part-time, as they have so many other homes to frequent. This upper-crust housing boom has distorted the market to the point where many builders have lost interest in constructing middle class dwellings.

Education follows suit. The wealthy pick posh suburbs to raise their kids. Schools there are automatically segregated, well-funded, and suitable to train our next generation of rulers. Either that, or Junior gets sent to private school, also

a healthy growing industry.

The Great Recession made this disparity of wealth and income notably worse by depressing tax revenue. Given that the Pentagon budget is supposedly sacrosanct, those required budget cuts must come from elsewhere.

Where exactly? Too often, the cuts are made to programs that provide for the most vulnerable Americans. Food stamps and housing benefits are on the chopping block. Meanwhile, the middle class plays musical chairs for an ever-shrinking number of decent jobs.

This stagnation can't keep pace with our growing population, and the leftover workers are stuck with jobs that don't

pay a living wage, if they can find work at all.

Could Congress cure all this? Maybe if it tried. It could, for example, raise the minimum wage, levy higher taxes on the wealthy and corporations, root out military pork, universalize health care, cap outrageous CEO pay, block trade deals that encourage the export of American jobs, and keep us out of new wars.

But don't count on our lawmakers to do any of those sensible things. The Roaring Twenties are back — seven years early.

OtherWords columnist William A. Collins is a former state representative and former mayor of Norwalk, Conn.

Uncomfortable with Humanitarian Murder

A gauge of our moral progress

BY DAVID SWANSON

On a recent Sunday night on "60 Minutes" John Miller of CBS News said, "I've spoken with in-



telligence analysts who have said an uncomfortable thing that has a ring of truth, which is: the longer this war in Syria goes on, in some sense the better off we are."

Now, why would that be uncomfortable, do you suppose? Could it be because encouraging huge numbers of violent deaths of human beings seems sociopathic?

The discomfort that Miller at least claims to feel is the gauge of our moral progress, I suppose, since June 23, 1941, when Harry Truman said, "If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible."

The next day, Time magazine's Aryn Baker published an article under the headline "Syria's Rebels Turn on One Another, and That's Not a Bad Thing."

Baker's point wasn't that more would die this way, but that this would allow the U.S. to escalate the war (which of course would mean more dying).

Remember that President Obama's reason for wanting to attack Syria is to "confront actions that are violating our common humanity." How is it that support for mass killing rarely seems to violate our common humanity if it's that other 96 percent of humanity getting killed, and especially if it's this 4 percent doing it?

Why is the excuse to kill more people always that others are

being killed, while we never starve people to prevent them from starving others or rape people to protect them from raping others?

The uncomfortable "60 Minutes" interviewer addressed his remarks to a former CIA officer who replied by disagreeing. He claimed to want the war to end. But how would he end it? By arming and aiding one side, just enough and not too much — which would supposedly result in peace negotiations, albeit with a risk of major escalation. While nobody ever works to extend peace in order to generate war, people

are constantly investing in war in the name of peace.

As this man may be very well aware, arming one side in this war will encourage that side's viciousness and encourage the other side to arm itself further as well. But suppose it were actually true that you could deescalate a war by escalating a war. Why are the large number of people who would be killed in the process unworthy of consideration?

We've seen lawyers tell Congressional committees that killing people with drones is either murder or perfectly fine, depend-

ing on whether Obama's secret memos say the killings are part of a war. But why is killing people acceptable in a war? We've just watched public pressure deny Obama missile strikes on Syria. Those strikes were optional. Had they happened that would have been a choice, not an inevitability. What of the immorality involved?

The best news is that we're beginning to feel uncomfortable.

David Swanson's books include War Is A Lie and When the World Outlawed War and he is syndicated by PeaceVoice.

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