

SNG-angry males redux-8-15-16

Angry white males redux

By Jim Nowlan

I received some flack, though less than I expected, over my recent column about angry white males. In that piece, I expressed support for strikes by service workers, as among tools that might increase compensation for those in the lower and middle classes.

I admit to having been in a provocative mood as I wrote that, and before-the-fact, blanket support for any activity, including strikes, is rarely justified.

Yet the column expressed my deep concern about the ever widening wealth gap between the haves on the one hand and the often-struggling sons and daughters of former manufacturing plant workers who in my day earned middle class incomes.

I worry that the cord tethering social classes in American civil society might soon be stretched so tight as to snap. Let's hope my concerns are overblown.

There are basically two ways to redistribute wealth—through either government or the private sector. I think doing it through the private sector is far superior.

Conservatives such as the late economist Milton Friedman as well as some present-day so-called “reform conservatives” have expressed support for a “basic guaranteed income” for all, provided by government, of course.

To me, this runs the risk of what I call the “dependency disease.”

Few people want something for nothing, yet after a while a person can become almost comfortable with a regular government check in the mail.

I have to think that some relatively fit people who have opted for the disability income program (referred to around my parts as “white man’s welfare”) have to hate themselves, deep down inside, for gaming the system.

And those with wealth, who are after all paying for welfare programs, come to resent sharing their hard-earned resources with those on the dole.

It’s all human nature, and it’s toxic.

Further, some employers can factor the income provided via government programs into their wage offerings. I have, for example, listened to an audio of a McDonald’s “help line” counselor advising an employee on how to apply for food stamps.

That’s why I think wealth redistribution through the private sector is much better.

A higher minimum wage does result from a government policy, but it is still implemented between employer and employee.

And of course wage boosts in contracts hammered out between sometimes striking workers and company ownership are private sector bargains.

What is a job worth? What is the monetary value of a task unfulfilled because of the withholding of labor, say the uncleaned bed pan in the hospital or nursing home, or the grocery store that doesn’t open for lack of workers?

And at the other end of the spectrum, what is the real worth of knowingly selling near-worthless bundles of mortgages to unsuspecting investors—with the seller still walking away with scores of millions in commissions?

Life is a genetically-driven game of king of the hill, of proving one’s fitness. And the modern-day struggle between labor and capital is but a part of that game.

It is rather ironic that, after winning at the king of the hill game by accumulating great wealth, people will later implement their own resource redistribution programs by creating eleemosynary (your word for the day) foundations to do good for others.

As manufacturing jobs wither away, the supply of service sector jobs will continue to grow. People with wealth are able and willing to pay someone else to do more and more tasks for them.

The big challenge facing America is to devise systems that discourage malingering, reward work, and reduce wealth inequality.

Sounds simple enough, yet it will entail major, wrenching conflict in our society, as few want to give up what they have accumulated via the sweat of their brow.