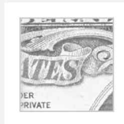

A PRICE TOO HIGH

EARLY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, a distinguished CEO, Pepsi-Cola's Roger Enrico, made somewhat of an unexpected remark to author Jeffrey Garten.

"We have to care about the distribution of wealth," Enrico noted, "because the fact of the matter is if there's a shrinking middle class, that's not a good thing."[1]

Not a good thing. Four words that summed up decades of research into inequality by scholars from nearly every academic discipline, from economics to epidemiology. Societies that let wealth concentrate at the top, these scholars have shown, pay an incredibly high price. Societies that stand by idly as middle classes break apart and sink have no future, at least no future their people will ever rush to see.

Roger Enrico may not have read this research. He really didn't need to read it. He understood, at some gut level, that societies work best when most people live their lives at a level of abundance not outrageously higher or lower than their neighbors.

Our basic human common sense, as evolved over many millennia, has imprinted us with this understanding. Our best human societies recognize the common bonds we all share. Our worst frown on sharing — and honor, with power, those who share the least. In these distinctly unequal societies, concentrated wealth overpowers common sense and leaves us lusting for what the wealthy have and we do not. In our lust, we pay no attention to cost. We pay any price. We eventually bankrupt our societies and our souls.

Those who champion inequality, despite its cost, sometimes do acknowledge that inequality may not always be a "good thing." But inequality, they insist, is the only thing. The march of civilization demands it. We have no choice but to accept it.

They are wrong. Alternatives do exist. We have been less unequal in the past. We can be less unequal again.

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