

Middle-class shrinkage — A recent article by Nancy Cleeland in the Los Angeles Times (Aug. 23), lachrymously headlined “Rich, Poor Live Poles Apart in L.A. as Middle Class Keeps Shrinking,” sets a new standard for blindness to the obvious. If there were an award for this sort of ideologically myopic journalism, Nancy Clueless would win it hands down.

Her article is part of an endless stream of L.A. Times (and N.Y. Times) propaganda intended to show that our economy is in another Great Depression caused by the evil Bush tax cuts that benefit only the rich. The Times — lovingly called “Pravda West” by the locals — wants to help elect leftists who will “restore prosperity” by jacking up taxes.

She cites “experts” who aver that L.A. is losing its middle-class neighborhoods and moving toward a two-class society, with poor folks (such as recent low-skilled immigrants) huddling in wretched communities while the rich (such as entertainers) luxuriate in splendiferous ones. She laments this change, noting that in the post-WWII era there were plenty of high-paying manufacturing jobs in aerospace, but with the collapse of aerospace in the 1990s, those workers left. Her preferred solution is for local government to impose regulations requiring real estate developers to build more affordable housing for the poor, or else for the voters to pass massive bonds to subsidize such housing, eventually to be paid by property taxes — this in a state whose structural deficit is already massive.

She never even once mentions the obvious reasons for the flight of the middle class from L.A. (and California generally). Yes, aerospace was cut (her buddy Clinton cut defense spending by 40%, of course). But for decades California has waged a vicious war on both business and the middle class. The state workers' comp rates are among the highest in the nation, virtually doubling labor costs in construction, which is a major cause of the ridiculously high price of housing.

California has an embarrassment of environmentalist regulations, making construction difficult, which again results in high home costs, and keeping the state from constructing new highways, which results in extremely long commute times for working people. The state is tort lawyer heaven, enabling parasitic attorneys to sue businesses for trivial violations of disability laws and other codes, even when those attorneys don't actually have an injured client.

The state has insanely high taxes: an income tax of nearly 10% on even modest incomes; steep gasoline taxes (even as the state moves toward more toll roads); sales taxes near 9%; a car tax; and user fees on a variety of services too numerous to mention. All this taxation goes to support the most generous welfare state in the country, with the possible exception of New York. California has a notorious, labyrinthine mass of business and labor regulations that has driven manufacturing and other industries from the state.

Add to all this a teacher-union-run school system that ranks among the worst in the country, and is it any wonder the middle class is fleeing in massive numbers to states like Texas and Florida, which have no state income taxes and a welcoming business climate? Only someone with a severe case of left-wing blindness could be so oblivious to the obvious.

— Gary Jason