

Comments on poverty conditions in America

12 October 1999

To the WSWWS:

After three decades, I returned last summer to the hometown where I was born and raised, Brinkley, Arkansas. At first, I thought there would be an improvement from the one-room school poverty that I left in 1969. Instead, I found social conditions to be no better, or perhaps worse. Why didn't President Clinton make his home state one of the places he visited last July on his poverty tour of the United States?

Let me describe some of the living conditions facing the working population, including my own family, who live there. Many homes in the countryside don't have indoor running water. Instead, they use an outhouse. For the children of the town there are no forms of recreation, no swimming pools, no baseball fields, nowhere to play basketball, not even a movie. Kids are completely isolated from any exposure to art or culture. In Brinkley, if someone gets sick they have to travel 50 to 70 miles to receive medical attention. Both white and black families struggle every day to survive.

My sister has been working for one of the shirt factories in the region for seven years. She makes \$5.15 per hour and receives no vacation time. A significant portion of the rural population is still tied to farming the land as the only means of survival.

A census report of Brinkley gives you an idea of what the community looks like. There are 203 white families and 109 black families making between \$10,000 and \$14,000 a year. The majority of the town's residents, dependent on public assistance, live on less than \$5,000 a year.

During my visit last summer, there was a heat wave passing over all of the Southern states. Throughout the region, one person, primarily from among the very young or the elderly, died every day as a result of the extreme temperatures. Because most of the old are on limited incomes, they cannot afford air conditioning. The same goes for those living on government assistance. Many families that have air conditioners

will not use them because of the electricity bills.

It took me three decades to learn that under the present two-party system nothing can or will be accomplished to better these conditions. As a worker and a political person I see the need to fight against the oppressive social conditions that the working class and the poverty-stricken face every day. The working class have to know that there is an alternative to the present capitalist system. There is enough wealth produced by the workers so there shouldn't be families living at a poverty level. We have to make sure there is enough for everyone to have what they need to survive.

MC

To the editor:

I think it is so funny how people take a census about the poor and uninsured—no one can or will have the real number of people who are just getting by in America.

The saying goes: you never know a man's life until you've walked a mile in his shoes.... There are more people sitting in their living rooms complaining about the way America is going than are actually telling anyone out there. I am here writing to someone only to ask: why are the wages staying the same and everything else is going up?

Insurance rates for health are so high, but you have to pay out more than the care that you get.... It costs a person, just to walk into the office, \$20 or more just to wait until the doctor will even see them. Are we paying the rent on the chairs we sit in? I have waited hours in an emergency room just to see a doctor, then got a bill for 15 minutes of the doctor's time.

I am one of those in-betweeners, the ones who can't afford insurance but make too much to get a medical card. Make too much—ha! That's a laugh in itself. Yes, by government standards we do. If doctors and insurance companies would do the job they are paid to do, then Congress would not have to be passing bills and taking a census of a population of people that they can't even keep up with.

Instead of worrying about themselves and their greed they should think about someone else, not just for five seconds either. Because in that five seconds someone could die because they weren't counted. What they need on Capitol Hill is some human compassion—not mansions, luxury cars and fancy dinner parties, talking about their golf game or about sports.

No, I don't expect the government to keep me, but let go of the reins so people can make a honest living and be able to get healthcare without taking all their money to do so. It's pretty bad when a man works seven days a week and can only bring home \$400-\$500 a week and then it only pays the bills. Yeah, by government standards that may look pretty good. But guess what? There are people making less than that. What about food and clothing and the little things?...

Sincerely,

MN



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