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## Residents speak on social crisis in San Bernardino, California following mass shooting in December

**Our reporters**  
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The December 2 mass shooting in San Bernardino, California has garnered significant attention in the mainstream media and internationally. But as far as the actual plight of workers in the city is concerned, the ruling class and its lackeys in the corporate media could care less.

According to the Obama administration and the corporate media, the attack by Syed Farook, 28, and his wife Tashfeen Malik, 27, which killed 14 people, necessitates unobstructed government access to all data encryption technologies on the Internet and the further intensification of bloodletting in Iraq and Syria. Republican candidate Donald Trump used the attack as a pretext to openly call for a travel ban on all Muslims attempting to enter the U.S. under the guise of “protecting Americans.”

Despite constant coverage of the San Bernardino shootings in the mainstream media, little attention has been given to the city’s recent bankruptcy, widespread poverty and the overall social distress experienced by city residents. For all intents and purposes, the city’s poor and working class don’t exist and are considered an inconvenient distraction from the “war on terror” narrative.

Once considered an “All American City,” home to extensive aerospace and steel production, the city is now the nation’s second poorest city with more than 200,000 residents, just after Detroit. The median household income in the city is \$39,097, significantly less than the national median of \$51,939 and the state median of \$61,400.

The Inland Empire, the larger metropolitan area of which San Bernardino is a part, has the highest percentage of people below the poverty line of any such area in the country. In a recent analysis, 20.4 percent of Inland Empire residents lived below the federal poverty line, a mere \$11,770 for an individual and \$15,930 for a family of two.

These conditions have been exacerbated by the city’s bankruptcy proceedings. As a result of its \$45 million deficit, essential city services have been gutted, including firefighting, parks maintenance, street sweeping and garbage collection.

To put matters in perspective, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, the fourth richest man in the country with a net worth of \$47 billion, could pay for the San Bernardino bankruptcy 1,000 times over using his own assets. Amazon itself has benefitted handsomely from the stationing of a mega distribution center right outside the city, where the majority of workers are employed casually with hourly pay slightly greater than minimum wage.

The gravity of various indices of social devastation is immediately obvious to anyone who visits the city, as it’s virtually impossible to avoid coming into contact with the deplorable conditions that residents have to

endure.

City parks, for example, are in complete disrepair. Several of the city’s major downtown parks, including the Secombe Lake Park, have become homeless encampments with dry yellow grass, and in some cases barren stretches of dirt where football and baseball fields once stood. Homes and businesses are often boarded up with empty lots everywhere. Closed fire stations and hospitals are not difficult to come across in spite of the city’s population of more than 200,000 people.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke to San Bernardino residents about social conditions in the city as well as their feelings about the December 2 attack and its aftermath.

Ramon, a longtime resident, said, “The government is all messed up. Personally, I believe that everything’s corrupt. People can only just fend for themselves. About the shooting, I feel for the people who lost their family, but I’m looking at the other side as well. The government’s using it to get you on their side. The Democrats are doing it, the Republicans are doing it.”

Another longtime resident, Mike, spoke about conditions in the nearby factories.

“I’m from Riverside and have lived in San Bernardino for about 12 years. I’ve had a couple jobs and I’ve been pretty good, but wherever you go there’s controversy and opposition. We don’t have to be robbed by criminals, we’re already getting robbed, legally, and there’s nothing we can do but smile and bear it.

“There are some warehouses paying as low as \$8.50 to \$9 [per hour]. There are a lot of people in their 50s and 60s, social security folks. And these people in the warehouses are working without medical insurance. They work 40 plus hours. We just went through holidays and you can best believe they were working double shifts. There are 60 year olds stuck working in grocery stores. People are dying, having heart attacks, because of their work, but they have no choice.

“My daughter—she’s 21 and works for Amazon. Last week she says, ‘There are people there who look like they’re older than you.’ It’s a slave trade, you never get what you work for. I talked to a lady last week who’s been at Walmart for 23 years and she’s not in management. She says she’s ok with \$24/hour. I said that’s a dollar for every year she’s worked. She should be retired by now.”

Desiree Martinez brought her eight-month-old daughter Aleyah to shop at the 99 Cent Store near the city’s downtown area.

“I’ve lived my whole life here. To be honest, it’s getting worse. It was

terrible what happened at the regional center. And on the news they say that more people are buying guns.

"I work at a CD store in the mall, and I don't get paid enough at all. The place closes on Tuesday, and two of us get three days each. We work from 9:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m. and make between \$120-125 a week. If the other person can't work one day, I'll get to work another day. Then I'll get paid \$140 for the week. Of course, I don't have any benefits.

"I can barely take care of myself and my baby. I also get WIC and food stamps to buy more food. My mom lives next door to us. She helps me with babysitting when she can, but sometimes she doesn't feel well because a car hit her.

"We live in a very bad area. But it's cheap, \$550 for a one bedroom [apartment]. The landlord pays for the water and trash pickup. The area is really ugly. So I try to make my home nice inside, away from all the crime and other stuff. At night you can always hear guns shooting and girls screaming for help.

"There are a lot of homeless people here. Many are in the parks. That's all you see. And now that the weather is freezing at night, it must be terrible for them. Do you see the tents there next to the apartments? That's a homeless person living there."

Brenda Garcia said, "I've lived here for 11 years. I used to do administrative work for a staffing agency, plus working a second job. The workload from constant work was so stressful for me that I had a panic attack, which also triggered a bipolar condition. So now I'm disabled, mentally disabled.

"I actually teach an arts and crafts class at the Behavioral Health Center, which is like a sister organization to the Inland Regional Center where the terrorist attack happened. It's one of the main crisis centers. It's a great place. People can go there to get fed, attend anger management classes, and get all kinds of services. The arts and crafts class helps people deal with trauma.

"The terrorist attack shook up a lot of people, and it still does. On the news, you hear about possible terrorist plots at the Rose Parade, in New York City, and everywhere. They're trying to keep you on your toes.

"I live with my fiancé and our cats. After losing my two jobs, I am barely making it. Now I have no unemployment and no SSI. Social Security is taking forever to approve my application. My fiancé also lost his job in construction. I've also lost my good car due to failure to pay, and now I'm driving a second-hand car.

"There are a lot of vets out there, and many are homeless. They need help to deal with their PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], and they need jobs. One of my friends who served in Afghanistan has no job, and now he's homeless in Texas. It's very hard to transition from serving in a war and then coming back here to start all over again."

Alma Gonzalez, a resident for 21 years, said, "Three months ago I got laid off from a hair salon. I had worked there for nine years. Altogether, I've been working 25 years straight with no time off or vacations. So actually I'm happy to be off.

"Luckily my husband has a good job as a welder for Terex here in San Bernardino. There are only four employees, and there's a lot of work for them because they do very good work. It's nonunion. He's making enough so that I can afford to be home."

She introduced her son Daniel, who is in seventh grade. Asked what kind of changes have happened over the years in the schools, she said, "I have an older daughter. When she was attending elementary school, they had a lot of field trips. But when Daniel was in grade school, they only got two field trips a year. In elementary school there's really too much homework given to the kids. It's all this Common Core stuff."

Daniel said, "There are a lot of kids in my classes. Usually there's 34 students in a class, and I have six classes each day. Actually the teachers are leaving because the kids are so bad! And we have to do Common Core too."

Alma continued, "There's a lot of drugs out there and a lot more homeless today. When I first moved here, it wasn't like that. Now you see the homeless everywhere. They used to have shelters for them. The problem is they closed them down.

"We used to have very nice parks here. There's a beautiful lake in the middle of Seccombe Lake Park. Every 4th of July we used to go there to watch the fireworks. Now it's a homeless park."

Jolene works as a parts puller at a local auto supply warehouse.

"I've lived in San Bernardino nearly all my life and I can tell you that things have gone from bad to worse, especially in, like, the last ten years I'd say. We used to have the Airforce base, the Kaiser steel plant and a lot of steady jobs. I wouldn't say it was paradise, but it was steady, you know?

"After the bankruptcy and the shooting there was a campaign called 'SB Strong,' I'm sure you've heard of it, and it looks like they're trying to turn things around. I hope they do. I have two nephews who work in the warehouses, and I'm happy they're working, but they don't make much. They usually only get \$10 or \$11 an hour and their work isn't regular.

"One thing about the terror attack is that San Bernardino has been in the news constantly. I think it's good, we're on the map now, but they never talk about the real city, you know? I feel very bad for these families but they never talk about the poverty and the homelessness. All these media people and politicians need to do is take a quick drive into downtown and they'll see it everywhere. But they don't. They don't really care about us. They just want to score some points with this incident and then leave us."

Sonia Hernandez has lived in San Bernardino for three years after coming from the city of Los Angeles. She lives with her brothers on disability due to extensive hours working in hotels.

"The shooting at the regional center was very sad. Now, because of this, it is more difficult for immigrants to stay and live here. I know that this month there have been many deportations already. I know that a lot of this is coming from Obama. These families don't have anything to do with terrorism, but they're being deported anyways."

When asked about the deteriorating social conditions in San Bernardino, Hernandez said, "I know that everywhere you go here you see many people living on the streets. I don't understand why they won't give section 8 housing to many of these immigrants who are just trying to work hard.

"But also, American people are also suffering. It is not just the immigrants and I see many homeless people who are veterans and African American. Why are they not given housing too?

I think San Bernardino is very bad now, but I can tell you that you see many of these same conditions in LA where I used to live. Things are bad wherever you go unless you're very rich."



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