

The reality of poverty in America: SEP candidate replies to Obama's "frustration" over social discontent

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30 April 2016

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President Barack Obama, according to an interview published in the *New York Times* this week, is "frustrated" that Americans are not convinced by his administration's declarations of an "economic recovery." According to the *Times* article, Obama feels "vastly under-appreciated" by the US population for all the work he has done for them.

I doubt that the president is so naïve, but in case he needs a reminder of the source of social discontent, he might turn to any number of recent reports documenting the extreme levels of inequality, poverty and general economic and social distress that afflict the vast majority of the American population.

He could start by directing his attention to a recent Brookings Institution report detailing the growth of the number of people living in extremely poor neighborhoods. Between the year 2000 and the period spanning 2010-14, the number of people living in neighborhoods with a poverty rate higher than 40 percent grew by nearly 110 percent, from 6.5 million to nearly 14 million.

Out of the 45 million Americans who live in poverty, approximately 14 percent, or 6.3 million people, now live in neighborhoods marred by extreme poverty. The greatest increases in concentrated poverty among the country's largest metro areas came in the southwestern states of California and Arizona and the deindustrialized Rust Belt states of Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and New York.

Areas of highly concentrated poverty can be found

throughout the country. The Brookings list is topped by McAllen, Texas, where more than half of poor people live in extremely poor neighborhoods, followed by Fresno, California; Toledo, Ohio; Syracuse, New York and Detroit, Michigan.

Documented in such figures are processes in which large portions of cities are turned into concentrations of unemployment, low-wage jobs and home foreclosures. In Detroit, this tendency was enormously accelerated by the city's bankruptcy, backed by the Obama administration. A small section of downtown and midtown was turned into a virtually wholly-owned subsidiary of a handful of billionaires, while pensions, wages and public education spending have been slashed.

Urban centers are not unique, however. Poverty has also risen significantly over the last 15 years in suburban areas, with more than 1 million people outside of urban areas now living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. Workers of every race and ethnicity have been affected, black and white, immigrant and native born.

Such facts, which expose the complete failure of the capitalist system in the wealthiest country in the world, are ignored or quickly shoved under the rug by the mainstream media. While corporations make record profits and squirrel their trillions in offshore and onshore tax havens, the working class is told repeatedly that there is no money for better wages, benefits, schools, roads or social programs.

Is it any wonder that so many working Americans are not pleased with the current situation?

The dramatic growth in poverty and associated social problems over the last 15 years is not the outcome of

merely abstract economic processes, as Obama is wont to claim. Rather it is the result of deliberate bipartisan policy decisions carried out by Republicans and Democrats alike, from Bill Clinton's ending of welfare, to George W. Bush's massive tax cuts, through Obamacare and the halving of autoworkers' wages through the 2009 restructuring. Even as millions have been driven into poverty, trillions of dollars have been wasted on wars of aggression and plunder in the Middle East and Central Asia.

These policies have driven social inequality to their highest levels in history. The total wealth of the top 20 billionaires in the US is equal to that of the bottom 150 million. The growth in social inequality is expressed in the growing gap in life expectancy between the rich and the poor, along with an astonishing growth in the number of drug overdoses and suicides.

The economic situation is "pretty darn great," Obama proclaimed last month. A fitting epitaph to his presidency. Such remarks expose the great gulf which exists between a political establishment that serves the interests of the financial aristocracy, personified by Obama, and the working class in the US and around the world.

Jerry White and I are the only candidates that represent the interests of the working class in these elections. The Democrats are preparing to nominate Hillary Clinton, with the "socialist" Bernie Sanders pledging his support. Clinton, a tried and true representative of Wall Street, will run an extremely right-wing campaign. Both candidates have draped themselves in the legacy of the Obama administration. The Republican candidate, whether it is Trump or one of his equally right-wing competitors, is equally committed to making the working class pay for the bankruptcy of capitalism and the money-mad ruling class that presides over it.

To abolish poverty and end social inequality, the Socialist Equality Party calls for the nationalization of the banks and the transformation of all large corporations worth more than \$10 billion into publicly owned enterprises under the democratic control of the working class. We also call for a multi-trillion-dollar public works program to provide everyone with a decent paying job and the rebuilding of the country's decrepit infrastructure.

Such a program can only be achieved through the

complete overturn of global capitalism and the establishment of an international socialist system in which the working class democratically controls the economy. I call on all of those sick and tired of the capitalist status quo to join our election campaign and take up this fight today.



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