

Thanksgiving in Los Angeles: Widespread hunger and homelessness

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While over the Thanksgiving holiday in the US public officials posture as humanists and philanthropists and the media broadcasts hypocritical messages of good will, a closer look reveals a squalid picture of decay affecting wide layers of American society.

The richest country on earth increasingly displays conditions that are typical of a third world country — homelessness, inequality, poverty, food insecurity and mental illness have become features of American life for millions. California, the richest state in the US, is the quintessential expression of this reality.

Last August, 25,000 Californians signed a petition urging Governor Jerry Brown to declare a statewide emergency on homelessness. According to conservative figures, there are 115,000 homeless people in the state lacking basic human services.

Los Angeles County alone accounts for 47,000 on any given night, topping the nation with 13,000 chronically homeless people, according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's report to Congress released a week before Thanksgiving.

The “city of angels” also has 2,700 homeless veterans and more than 3,000 unaccompanied homeless youth. A figure released by the Los Angeles County Office of Education a few days ago reported that 63,000 young children in the county were homeless at some point in 2015-16.

Food insecurity affects large swathes of the state's working class. A September 2016 survey conducted by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 2010 and Occidental College's Urban & Environmental Policy Institute found that 70 percent of University of California's clerical, administrative, and support workers struggle to put adequate food on the table and

are considered food insecure. Of these, two thirds experience actual hunger from skipping meals or reduced food intake due to a lack of resources.

Last July, a survey by the University of California's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources' Nutritional Policy found that 19 percent of student respondents indicated “very low” food security, with an additional 23 percent of student respondents having “low” food security and 8 to 12 percent reported as homeless.

A World Socialist Web Site reporting team visited several locations in the Los Angeles Area on Thanksgiving Day.

The Los Angeles Mission Downtown traditionally organizes the “Skid Row Thanksgiving,” serving meals to the homeless who have taken residence in the area around 5th Street and San Pedro Street. This is a site of chronic homelessness, with blocks of tents and other precarious makeshift shelters.

Salvador, a film engineer and a volunteer at the Mission, was critical of the entire US establishment. “Everyone needs equality and equal chance. People are misled. The politicians that Trump is appointing to office are very disturbing to me. It reminds me of Hitler. I didn't want Hillary, given her corruption, scandals and murders. Sanders maybe would have been the best guy. But he's gutless, his endorsement of Clinton was disturbing. That tells me about those in politics: if they're not kissing babies, they're stealing their candies and the media belongs to them.”

He reflected on the undemocratic character of politics in the US: “I thought Obama started off well, but he took from workers to give to the banks, that's not our policy. I also disagree with mass deportations. This person, that person over here, doesn't have a word to say in the matter. Their voice has been muted. Someone

like Edward Snowden has balls for exposing the official lies. They would throw him and Assange into Guantanamo Bay if they could.”

Noah, a high school student, spoke on social inequality in the US. He said, “It’s huge. There’s a giant gap between the rich and the poor. There are a lot of people living in poverty in California. They’re not necessarily minorities, although that is a large component. The population living in poverty is very diverse and social inequality is very noticeable here.”

Commenting on the official response to social problems, he noted, “Political leaders didn’t see inequality as a big an issue like it needs be. When they passed laws, took social programs like welfare away in the last 25-30 years and changed guidelines and regulations it hurt people who were less fortunate. There is too little for the underprivileged; we need more programs for them.”

Compton is a very impoverished area in Los Angeles County, following a trend of deindustrialization in the last 35 years that has reduced entire cities to urban landscapes resembling war zones. Compton College organized a Thanksgiving event on campus for students experiencing hardship.

Deshaun a welding student at Compton College. Said he has experienced homelessness and food insecurity in recent times. “I’ve experienced hunger every now and then. I used to be a truck driver in Kansas, but lost my license and career after a DUI. I was diagnosed with diabetes and learned the hard way that it lowered alcohol tolerance. I don’t drink anymore.”

He voiced his opinion about outgoing and incoming president: “I don’t like any of them. I don’t trust the government, Obama or Trump. Everything on the media is propaganda, especially war. They gave guns to Saddam, to ISIS, to then turn against them and control the region.”

Deshaun was a casualty of the 2008 financial crisis: “That’s why I had to move to Kansas in 2009. I got laid off by BNSF Railway that year. Now I’m on food stamps with two children.”

“In this system you’re supposed to capitalize on everybody, prey on the weak and the unaware. Then they wonder why people act like they do: all we got is leftovers.

“The rich thrives on everybody’s exploitation. They talk about a raise in minimum wage, but the increase in

prices and rent more than neutralizes that. And when you get down to the core of it, it’s a class issue, not a color one.”

Michael is a theater major. “Last year I was in the ASB [Associated Student Body] and I saw that there was a need, so I decided to volunteer for this Thanksgiving event. There are homeless students that attend Compton, including some in my baseball team. One sees them brushing teeth and washing in the college restrooms in the morning, or taking showers in hotels when the team is on the road, so as not to embarrass themselves.” Hygienic conditions in this campus’ bathrooms are reportedly abysmal.

He noted: “Compton has a big homeless problem, I have sheltered homeless friends at times, even though my parents don’t always approve. Much of that comes from the economic crisis that we had, and are still having, though things have improved.”



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