

# What Will It Take to End Income Inequality in the United States?

50 years after the 'war on poverty' class divisions widen

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*Some five decades since President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a “War on Poverty” class divisions inside the United States are widening. Today in 2014, the conditions of poor and working people are never addressed by the Congress, the White House or within the board rooms of the multi-national corporations and financial institutions.*

President Barack Obama touched on this issue during his “State of the Union” speech on January 28 raising the issue of class polarization within a framework that bemoaned the structural barriers to people born and living in poverty. What of course was not said is that these growing disparities between rich and poor are an outcome of the capitalist restructuring that has been well underway for the last four decades.

How can poor and working people increase their incomes and improve their standard of living when millions of jobs have been eliminated from the U.S. and real wages for existing employment has precipitously declined over the years? There are no meaningful governmental or corporate programs that provide the type of assistance that working people need in order to survive inside urban and rural areas of the country let alone create conditions that would ensure their households and communities stability and safety.

## The Need for a Movement Based on Class Politics

During the period of the “War on Poverty” (1964-1968) the political atmosphere in the U.S. and around the world was marked by mass protests, rising political consciousness, urban rebellions and the founding of radical organizations in this country that were coupled with and influenced by socialist and national liberation revolutions in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. Johnson in 1964 was faced with the necessity of passing federal Civil Rights legislation domestically and attempts to stave off the protracted revolutionary struggles internationally, with Vietnam being the most pressing at the time.

The existence of the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China, North Vietnam, Revolutionary Cuba, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and other progressive states provided a counterweight to U.S. imperialism and its allies. In addition to the mass pressure from African Americans and their allies during the 1960s, Washington and Wall Street realized that they had to eliminate the obvious forms of racial discrimination and national oppression.

Nonetheless, the fundamental structures of the capitalist relations of production remained intact. In order to protect its interests the imperialists embarked upon measures that further

globalized the capitalist system of production and dis-empowered the working class and oppressed both inside the U.S. and around the globe.

Auto factories, steel mills, light industrial production and their subsidiary facilities were shut down and moved across the country or outside the U.S. in order to ensure and increase profitability. Union membership declined as a result of these actions and the federal government passed legislation which fostered this wholesale attack on the working class.

Many of the gains made during the Civil Rights Movement era of the 1950s and 1960s have been eroded with the outlawing of Affirmative Action in key states, the striking down by the Supreme Court of the enforcement provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the passage of "right to work" laws in several Northern and Midwestern states along with an ideological offensive against entitlement programs, municipal unions and public education.

These developments constitute an intensifying class war waged by the capitalists against the workers and the poor. The question of resolving the problem of income inequality must be viewed within this context by the trade unions and mass organizations concerned with the conditions of workers, urban policy, Civil Rights and Women's equality.

Until a movement comprised of class conscious organizations takes control of the political direction of the U.S. the conditions of the majority of the people will continue to worsen. The Democratic Party and the Republican Party both represent the interests of the bankers and the corporate bosses.

#### Youth, Oppressed Nations and Women Impacted Greatly by Crisis

A recent study of the social status of children in the city of Detroit revealed that the majority of them are living in poverty. Nonetheless, the U.S. Congress has recently passed legislation which cut allocations to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

In a recent series of articles published by the Detroit News it noted that "Prematurity, whose deadly side effects include brain hemorrhages, collapsed lungs and failing organs, is the leading killer of Detroit's babies. It's the major component of infant mortality — a catch-all term comprising all conditions that claim children before their first birthday." (January 30)

This same article continues saying "Infant mortality is the No. 1 killer of Detroit children; violence is second. In 2011 alone, 130 of the 208 Detroit children who died that year had not yet marked their first birthday."

A follow-up story on February 1 revealed that "Detroit kids died at a rate of 120 per 100,000 in 2010, the most recent year comprehensive national data is available. It was the only city to top a death rate of 100 per 100,000 children. At 95.7 child deaths per 100,000, Philadelphia was a distant second." (Detroit News)

Although poverty was mentioned indirectly as a factor in these statistics it was not emphasized as the major cause. The lack of universal healthcare, unemployment and racism must be taken into consideration when these types of statistics are reported.

The horrendous conditions prevailing in Detroit are mirrored albeit on a lesser scale across the U.S. When children are facing such grim prospects it inevitably means that women are bearing the brunt of the capitalist economic crisis.

A study sponsored by Maria Shriver entitled “Women in America” found that the conditions for at least one-third of women in the U.S. are considered far less than desirable. These women are living in poverty and this has an enormous impact on their children and other family members.

This study notes that “1 in 3 American women, 42 million women, plus 28 million children, either live in poverty or are right on the brink of it. (The report defines the “brink of poverty” as making \$47,000 a year for a family of four.) Nearly two-thirds of minimum wage workers are women, and these workers often get zero paid sick days.” (nation.time.com, January 13)

In addition, “Two-thirds of American women are either the primary or co-breadwinners of their families. The average woman is paid 77 cents for every dollar a man makes, and that figure is much lower for black and Latina women; African American women earn only 64 cents and Hispanic women only 55 cents for every dollar made by a white man.”

These circumstances facing working people, women, youth and the nationally oppressed cannot be solved by speeches alone which do not get to the root causes of poverty. The capitalist class and their allies in government offer no real solution and therefore people must assume that they have none.

The only solution to the rising problems of poverty and social depravation is to fundamentally restructure the economic and social system under which people live. The wealth which is hoarded by a small percentage of the population must be taken and redistributed to the masses of workers, youth and the nationally oppressed.

People must be guaranteed a job or an annual income that would ensure their well-being. Children and women within society must be taken care of through programs that provide for adequate healthcare, food, clothing, housing and education.

The existence of poverty and economic exploitation should be outlawed amid the existence of wealth that is controlled by a small minority. Genuine income equality can only take place when the wealth that is produced by working people is shared collectively among them.

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