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Christmas in America: Growing Poverty, Unemployment and Homelessness in the World's Richest Country

By Stephen Lendman

December 25, 2014

Washington is the grinch that stole Christmas. Bah Humbug defines its agenda.

Unprecedented in modern times. Privileged Americans never had it better. Ordinary ones face lump of coal harshness. Hard times keep getting harder.

Reflected in institutionalized inequality. Growing poverty. High unemployment. Multiples higher than phony Labor Department numbers. An epidemic of underemployment persists.

Jobs paying poverty or sub-poverty wages. With few or no benefits.

Households need two or three to get by.

Growing millions face “one impossible choice after another,” according to Poverty USA. “(B)etween food and medicine(s), getting to work or paying the heating bill.”

Census data show around half the population living in poverty or bordering it. In the world's richest country.

Affecting nearly 60% of children. America has a higher percent of working poor than any other industrialized country.

Human suffering is real. Neoliberal harshness is official policy. Force-fed austerity reflects it. Social injustice is rife.

Bipartisan complicity supports it. Ordinary people are increasingly on their own out of luck.

America's social contract is targeted for elimination. Disappearing when most needed. Monied interests alone are served.

Inequality is appalling. A race to the bottom persists. Class warfare defines it.

Most working Americans get by from paycheck to paycheck. One missed one away from possible homelessness, hunger and despair.

Inflation adjusted median household income keeps dropping. Americans have less to spend on increasingly more expensive goods and services.

People who eat. Drive cars. Pay rent. Service mortgages. Have medical expenses. Heat and/or air-condition residences.

Have children in college. Pay transportation costs. Know more about inflation than talking-head tout TV economists. The twelve days of Christmas now cost \$27,673.

Shadowstats economist John Williams estimates real inflation at 9%. Based on 1980s calculation model.

Manipulated government data produce phony numbers. Across-the-board. Creating an illusion of prosperity.

Ignoring protracted Main Street Depression conditions. Growing human misery. Beautiful America exists for its privileged elites alone.

US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) data show over 600,000 homeless Americans on any given night. Including nearly 140,000 children. Over 57,000 veterans.

Living in cars. Parks. Bus or train stations. Under bridges. On city streets. In homeless shelters. Short-term transitional housing.

According to the National Center for Homeless Education, over one million homeless children attend public schools.

America's hunger crisis is real. A daily reality for nearly 50 million people. Affecting around 13 million families. Mostly hardworking ones.

Not earning enough to live on. About 16 million children don't get enough to eat. One in six Americans face hunger.

So do one in five children. Missing meals is commonplace. Nutritious balanced diets for growing millions don't exist. Belly-fillers substitute.

Food stamps provide a woefully inadequate \$1.40 per person per meal.

Food banks supplement recipients when monthly benefits run out. Most often around 10 days or more before month's end.

Vital benefits are being cut when most needed. US resources go for war-making. Corporate handouts.

Massive public and private corruption in high places takes its toll.

Vital needs increasingly go begging.

Thirdworldizing America is official policy. Privileged interests alone benefit. Social inequality is institutionalized.

Millions struggle daily to pay rent. Service mortgages. Handle medical bills. Heat homes. Cover transportation costs. Manage increasingly more expensive daily expenses.

On October 31, Fortune magazine headlined "Wealth inequality in America: It's worse than you think."

Citing analysis of economists Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman. Showing a more extreme US wealth gap than any time since the Great Depression.

In a London School of Economics and Political Science web site article, Saez and Zucman show increased income inequality in America over the past four decades.

Saying "(t)he share of total income earned by the top 1 percent of families was less than 10 percent in the late 1970s but now exceeds 20 percent as of the end of 2012."

"A large portion of this increase is due to an upsurge in the labor incomes earned by senior company executives and successful entrepreneurs."

Wealth inequality rose. Defined as "the stock of all the assets people own, including their homes, pension savings, and bank accounts, minus all debts."

According to Saez and Zucman:

“Wealth inequality, it turns out, has followed a spectacular U-shape evolution over the past 100 years.”

“From the Great Depression in the 1930s through the late 1970s there was a substantial democratization of wealth.”

“The trend then inverted, with the share of total household wealth owned by the top 0.1 percent increasing to 22 percent in 2012 from 7 percent in the late 1970s.”

“The top 0.1 percent includes 160,000 families with total net assets of more than \$20 million in 2012.”

The wealthiest 160,000 families own as much wealth as the poorest 145 million. It’s about 10 times as unequal as income.

Affected by taxes made less progressive for decades. Soaring stock market valuations. Lack of middle and low-income family savings. Stagnant wages.

A changing job market. Low wage/poor or no benefit part-time or temp ones replacing living wage/good benefit full-time jobs.

Offshored to low-wage countries. New generations worse off than previous ones. In his book titled “Ill Fares the Land,” Tony Judt addressed the effects of post-2008 financial crisis.

Saying “(t)here has been a collapse in intergenerational mobility: in contrast to their parents and grandparents, children today in the UK as in the US have very little expectation of improving upon the condition into which they were born.”

“The poor stay poor. Economic disadvantage for the overwhelming majority translates into ill health, missed educational opportunity, and – increasingly – the familiar symptoms of depression: alcoholism, obesity, gambling, and minor criminality.”

A new Pew Research Center (PRC) study found an unprecedented wealth gap between middle and upper-income Americans.

“In 2013, the median wealth of the nation’s upper-income families (\$639,400) was nearly seven times the median wealth of middle-income families (\$96,500), the widest wealth gap seen in 30 years when the Federal Reserve began collecting these data,” said PRC.

America’s rich have a median net worth nearly 70 times greater than low-income families. Data show a disproportional wealth gap along racial and ethnic lines.

White household wealth is 13 times greater than for Blacks. Ten times more than for Hispanics.

So-called economic recovery for most Americans is pure fantasy. Protracted Main Street Depression conditions persist.

University of Michigan research shows wealth inequality doubled since 2003. America's top 5% has 426.5 times the wealth of bottom 25% households.

Other studies show America's top 1% has more wealth than the bottom 95%. The 400 richest families have as much as the bottom 50%.

In 1965, one in 50 Americans was on Medicaid. Today it's one in six. In the 1970s, about one in 50 Americans were on food stamps. Now it's one in five.

Over half the population needs aid to survive. Increasingly eroding en route to eliminating it altogether.

Tens of millions of working age Americans wanting jobs can't find them. Middle income households are fast disappearing.

Poverty is a growth industry. So is human misery. America is banana republicanized. Unfit to live in for growing millions.

Democracy is pure fantasy. A facade masking New World Order harshness. Monied interests run things. Class war rages.

Inside the bubble it's paradise. Outside it's dystopian hell. America is venal. Corrupted. Depraved. Degenerate. Too broken to fix.

"The foul stench of corruption and hypocrisy that emanates from Washington is the smell of a dying country," says Paul Craig Roberts.

Good tidings and cheer at Christmas and throughout the year are for America's privileged alone. No joy to the world for most others.