

Thinking About the Poor at the Holiday Season

by Norman Hill

The December holiday season is the time of year when people think most about the poor. The various movie versions of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* help to remind us that there are many Bob Cratchets out there. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, give money to sidewalk Santa Clauses. Countless others mail contributions to their favorite charities.

Unfortunately, in recent years concern about the poor has been especially appropriate, and the same is true this year. People living in our largest cities (and many of our medium- and smaller-sized ones) see the number of homeless swelling to alarming proportions. So urbanites don't need scholars or statisticians to tell them that something is wrong. But data gathered by experts can tell us more precisely and comprehensively what is happening — and why it is happening, as well.

The State of Working America (1988), a report by the Economic Policy Institute, found that real family income has been stagnant since 1979. And that's the good news. The bad news is that the families that maintained their income over the 1979-87 period had to work more hours and send more of their members into the work force. Those families that didn't send another member into the job market suffered income declines from 4% to 6.5% during those years.

The study also found that the income gap between the rich and poor has grown in this decade. The upper 20%,

and especially the top 5% of families, experienced significant income gains after 1979. But the bottom 40%, and especially those at the very bottom, saw their incomes fall after that year. A major reason for this is that in recent years income has shifted from labor to property. Property income (rents, dividends, and interest) increased by 49.9% between 1979 and 1987, while labor income grew by a mere 16.7%. (Real wages and salaries actually fell, but growth in the work force and in the

number of hours worked by the average worker created a net gain in total labor income.)

As usual, when bad news hits the nation, black com-

black and white poverty rates were higher in 1987 than at a comparable stage of the economic recovery of the late 1970s. But the black poverty rate has grown more

in 1986 to 49% in 1987.

A report of the Senate Budget Committee, *Wages of American Workers in the 1980s* (September 1988), provides an important reason for declining income and increasing poverty. The very first sentence of the report's summary states the matter cogently: "The dominant trend in job creation during the 1980s has been for low-paying jobs to replace those which provided a middle-class standard of living." In 1979, 64% of all American jobs paid middle-level wages

(between \$11,612 and \$46,444). Of all new jobs created from 1979 to 1987, only 38% was at this middle-wage level. More than 50% of the employment increase was in low-wage jobs (\$11,611 and below). The remaining 12% of new jobs were at the high-wage level (\$46,445 and above).

So people are correct when they sense that, beneath the relatively low unemployment and inflation figures flaunted by the Administration, something is awry.

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Norman Hill is President of the A. Philip Randolph Institute.

munities are hit worst. *Still Far From the Dream: Recent Developments in Black Income, Employment and Poverty* (October 1988), issued by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, provides the details. Both

Furthermore, the black poverty rate grew from 31.1% in 1986 to 33.1% in 1987, while the white rate declined from 11% to 10.5%. Perhaps most alarming, the poverty rate for black children under 6 jumped from 45.6%

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You will need to bring with you the following information:

1. Birth certificate on ALL family members
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2. Rent receipts
4. Social Security Cards
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Housing Authority of the City of Las Vegas
420 N. 10th Street
Las Vegas, Nevada 89101



Section 8 Announcement

THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE COUNTY OF CLARK, NEVADA is creating an application pool for the Section 8 Housing Assistance Payment Programs. These programs are for persons of limited means and provides assistance towards payment of their rent. Applications for zero and three bedroom units will be opened from Wednesday, Jan. 4th through Tuesday, Jan. 10th. To place an application you must come to our office at 5064 E. Flamingo Road. Please bring birth certificates and Social Security cards and a picture I.D. on all members of the household as well as proof of income. Our sign-up times are 8:30 AM to 11:30 AM, Monday through Friday and Tuesday afternoons from 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM.

The Housing Authority of the County of Clark, Nevada
5064 E. Flamingo Rd.
Las Vegas, NV 89122

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Specifications are available at the above address.

LAS VEGAS METROPOLITAN
POLICE DEPARTMENT
FISCAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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