

# Carl Rowan's Commentary

It was President Johnson on the phone, talking about a man he hoped I would hire at the U.S. Information Agency: "When you get his files you'll see that he had a little VD during World War II. But, hell, most real men have had a little VD."



CARL ROWAN

LBJ, like many others of the Vietnam War era, had a lively and sometimes mean fascination with the contents of the FBI personnel files. With the cooperation of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, he often abused those files by looking for dirt on those who opposed that war.

What Johnson did was only half-scandalous compared with what Hoover himself did. He kept his private files on American presidents, congressmen and other prominent citizens, and was known to use them to blackmail or extort favors. Hoover spilled forth raw bilge from his investigative files during what the FBI finally admitted were 25 separate campaigns to destroy Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

And now comes this disquieting, disgraceful business of the Clinton White House demanding — and getting — hundreds of FBI files about Republican staffers of the White House. We are going to have to endure congressional hearings, an investigation by independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr and endless campaign rhetoric about this weird business because the Clinton people look guilty of some sinister behavior.

The president looked foolish trying to dismiss the current caper as a "bureaucratic snafu."

I can't understand why the Clinton administration has not tried to do the right thing by at least giving Americans some preemptive facts. For example:

1. Who is the highest ranking White House official, or member of Mr. Clinton's re-election team, who approved or knew of the request to the FBI for the files?
2. What was that official's rationale for this request?
3. Did the FBI question the propriety of sending the White House so many sensitive files, given the precious woes of the FBI because of improper uses of the files?
4. Who in the FBI actually approved delivery of the files?
5. Who in the White House, including secretaries and aides, had access to these files?
6. From which files was information taken, to whom was such information disseminated, and to what use was it put?

It seems to me that this is the least that the White House can give voluntarily, sparing the country a wait to see what probes and investigators can drag out of those we now know to have been involved.

Not to voluntarily issue such information leaves the Clinton administration looking like a bunch of two-bit sleazeballs who will violate laws of privacy and everything else if it gives them a political advantage. It cloaks the Clinton White House in world class arrogance if, when caught in a romp through the files, it says, "Okay, let's see you figure out what we were doing and then convince voters that we're guilty of something."

Even a banana republic deserves better leadership than that!

## BETWEEN THE LINES

# POINT OF VIEW

## Welfare myths revealed in relationship between poverty and slave wages

By A. Asadullah Samad

A recent report that announced the number of children living poverty was on the rise in the United States brought forth some stunning realities of not only who lives in poverty and but why they live in poverty and what their income sources are. In a political season where you don't need a reason not to make sense, the hysteria over what welfare reform will ultimately look like came in this poverty report. As the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual study on the state of children living in America accurately call our, the historical popular view of poverty stricken habitants under 18 are most likely to be headed by single women on welfare, as well as black people (though an equal or greater number, depending whose statistics you go by, of welfare recipients are white.)

Now the report has identified the working poor as a key focus of poverty statistics, and while focusing on the lifestyles of children cast some stark realities on what the effects of some "workfare" proposals being waged around the nation as solutions for reducing welfare rolls and subsequently poverty will be. Welfare myths that poverty will be resolved as simply as sunseting welfare recipients into jobs, over a certain period of time, as the basis for creating economic sufficiency have some very misleading flaws.

Sure, putting welfare recipients to work will create a work ethic and build individual self-esteem, but as this report documents, it would make the impact eliminating welfare different than some like to tout. It will be a literal enslavement, and involuntary servitude by which the unskilled and the employable will be forced to "take work" and

accept wages not covering what it cost to live.

The plight of the working poor offers even greater constraints that impact their ability to change their quality of life. Limited opportunities, massive layoffs and technology improvements offer low wage workers very few options. The threat of exporting jobs to low wage countries have forced a greater number of low paying jobs on the America people. Global competition, profit and greed have many even predicting the return of a "sweatshop" mentality in the American labor. The return to yesterday has its drawbacks. Wishing for days "the way they were" also means wishing for controlled wages and rarely regulated work conditions. Unfortunately, people's desire (and will) to survive creates a market for those willing to work for little or (almost) nothing. It's a wage that will make many honestly employed, hardworking people economic slaves. They give working to survive a different meaning. From them, it's more like surviving to work and the quality of life won't change much. Poverty habitants working or sitting are almost one in the same.

The fastest growing segment of Americans living in poverty are the working poor. The Casey Report documents that children for the working poor climbed from under 3 million to 5.6 million between 1989 and 1994. Most of these families are ineligible for welfare and some have jobs with no benefits but make too much to qualify for Medicaid. The working poor are most likely to have latchkey children due to an inability to afford child care or after-school care. However, the policymakers turn their discussion on eliminating poverty, the first thing that comes up as the cause of poverty is joblessness and welfare. Often lost in these myopic discussions are very fundamental issues like what is the standard for "quality of life" and what is "income sufficient to earn a decent living." For many, working has lost it's incentive and now is losing it's dignity in being able to provide a decent standard of living. This may be why the welfare rolls are a more sensible option. If you're going to lose your dignity, lose it at home, collecting a check is the mindset of many. A stipend, food and medical entitlements that many low paying jobs don't offer. With half of black children already living below the poverty line, proposals to sunset welfare

eligibility would devastate many families who can't find employment and force those who can into a situation of mandatory employment. Remember, everybody had a job during slavery. They didn't pay much, but they were paid something (sometimes). The poverty impact on our communities can be expected to spread and have much more far-reaching effects, including growth in the homeless population.

Prior to the recent Congressional vote to raise the minimum wage from \$4.25 per hour to \$5.15 within the next two years, it had become quite clear that the minimum wage debate had a greater sensitivity to what the impact on business would be, versus what the benefit to the working class would be. Between trying to discern which tax break to give the super-rich, which tax rate to give the rich, which way to best tax the middle class, the working class poor (I refuse to categorize as the "lower" class, though they are an underclass, economically) is a forgotten segment of the population. Yet, it's a class that is growing everyday and more see the American dream slipping from their grasp. But these are hardworking people, with jobs, and a work ethic and all the other attributes rarely associated with people in poverty. In fact, poverty and welfare have almost become synonymous terms in some ignorant circles. Maybe its



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because they are also the ones most likely to be exploited. Now that there has been some measurement of what the impact of low wage employment is, strategies must be designed to take more than wage into consideration. Working people must be incentivized to keep working and welfare recipients must be given technical support (more than get a job by March or you're cut off). This separation of class is growing and America's commitment to the best standard of living in the world will be called into question as the working poor become slaves to low wages.

Welfare myths can be easily dis-spelled, but the realities of poverty are in the statistics. Poor people are not just lazy people disinterested in work and laying up on the taxpayers. Many are the taxpayers, who after taxes can't pay their bills but are slaves to their employment and the restrictions that come about from working.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Stop the racist church burnings

The Communist Party, USA joins with all Americans in expressing revulsion and outrage at the firebombing of the African American churches across the United States. As the elections approach, the fire

bombings have escalated. It calls for the broadest urgent fightback response from the anti-racist majority of the American people.

Newt Gingrich, Jesse Helms and other right-wing extremist politicians in Washington have created the atmosphere for these hate crimes. There are daily  
*(See Letters, Page 11)*



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