

Britain: Forty percent of children live in poverty

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More than 40 percent of children in the United Kingdom are living in poverty, according to the latest research. That is some 5.5 million children.

Whilst official measures of child poverty are based on a national survey of family income, the new research published by the Campaign to End Child Poverty was compiled using tax credit data. This gives the percentage of children on low incomes in local authorities and constituencies across the UK, as well as at the more local ward level in England and Wales and in local zones in Scotland.

There are two groups of children whose families receive the maximum Child Tax Credit because they have low incomes. Some 2,895,000 children are in families claiming Child Tax Credit, plus a Working Tax Credit entitlement related to their earnings. Another 2,664,000 children live in families claiming tax credits that also depend on benefits, because no one in the family is employed.

In 174 of the 646 parliamentary constituencies across the UK, more than 50 percent of children fall into these categories. Naturally there is a wide discrepancy between affluent and poorer constituencies.

Whilst the constituencies with the lowest levels of families in poverty are Buckingham and the prosperous constituency of Sheffield Hallam, both with 17 percent, the parliamentary constituency with the highest number is in Birmingham Ladywood, with 81 percent or 28,420 children living in poverty.

Other areas with high child poverty are Bethnal Green and Bow in London, with 79 percent (23,450), Bradford West with 75 percent (24,900) and Nottingham East with 68 percent (12,360).

At more localised levels, the poverty rate is even higher. For example, in the London electoral wards of Tower Hamlets, Bethnal Green South and St.

Dunstan's and Stepney Green there are very high levels of child poverty, with 87 percent. When broken down still further, the concentration is even greater. For example, in the two zones selected by the Campaign to End Child Poverty in parts of Glasgow Baillieston--Central Easterhouse and North Barlarnark and Easterhouse South--98 percent of children are living in poverty.

The Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion has compiled the research figures by using data from August 2006. Economic developments since then will have already further increased child poverty. Rising food and energy prices and the slump of the housing market are pushing ever more people to the brink.

The Campaign to End Child Poverty, which is made up of more than 120 organisations including children's charities, child welfare organisations, social justice groups, faith groups, trade unions and others, will stage a rally in Trafalgar Square as part of its Keep The Promise campaign on Saturday, October 4. The "promise" refers to the pledge to end child poverty made by Tony Blair when the Labour Party came to power in 1997.

At last week's Labour Party Conference, Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced plans described as "ground-breaking legislation" to enshrine in law Labour's pledge to halve child poverty by 2010 and to end it fully by 2020.

However, Brown gave no concrete details on this legislation or the policies that would be employed by Labour to this end. And there has been no further information forthcoming. Not only is the target of halving child poverty out of reach, but figures show that it has in fact increased over the last two years by 200,000.

In reality, Brown's pledge was made in recognition

of the fact that Labour's original promise is nowhere near being met. Nor could it be, given that the Labour government is entirely beholden to big business and the super-rich and that all its policies to this end have only increased social inequalities.

While Labour continues to make empty promises, it is fully aware that these cannot be squared with its using billions of taxpayers' money to bail out billionaire and multimillionaire shareholders and bankers. Brown's never-ending guarantees to do whatever is necessary to save the system will mean further handouts for failing banks and rising taxes, rising prices and deeper attacks on social benefits for workers, driving even more children into poverty.



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