

Poverty up sharply in US South

Ed Hightower
20 October 2011

The economic crisis continues to increase poverty in the US, according to the recently released US Census Bureau's *Report on Income, Poverty and Health Insurance*, a study that examines data collected from approximately 100,000 households in 2010.

The official US poverty rate in 2010 was 15.1 percent, an increase of 0.8 percent from 2009 and the third consecutive increase since 2007 when the figure was 12.5 percent. Approximately 46.2 million Americans lived in poverty in 2010, while 49 million were without health insurance. Forty-six of the 50 US states saw an increase in the poverty rate from 2009 to 2010, and median household income fell in all regions.

The South witnessed an increase in both poverty rates and the total number of people in poverty, with a poverty rate of 16.9 percent and 19.1 million people in poverty in 2010, up from 15.7 percent and 17.6 million in 2009. Median household income in the region fell 1.9 percent, from \$46,368 to \$45,492 annually.

Unemployment in the South now exceeds that in the Northeast and the Midwest. Only the West, where the housing bubble collapsed with particular ferocity, has higher unemployment.

For decades, the so-called sun belt, extending through the mid-Atlantic and Southeast and parts of the Southwest into California, enjoyed a lower unemployment rate than the Northeast, Midwest and Northwest, which were the traditional bastions of militant unionized workers.

The latest data show that of the 10 states with the highest unemployment rates, 6 are in the South. The manufacturing and construction sectors—hard hit by the

economic crisis—have led the drop in employment in the region.

Certain states in the South show particularly disturbing statistics. Mississippi had the highest official poverty rate, at 22.7 percent, followed by Louisiana, the District of Columbia, Georgia, and then two southwestern states, New Mexico and Arizona.

In North Carolina, the state poverty rate rose to 17.5 percent in 2010, a 22 percent increase since 2007, when the recession began. The median household income fell by 12.3 percent during the same time period. The number of Alabamians living in poverty rose from 16.6 percent in 2009 to 17.3 percent in 2010.

The United Way of Central Alabama has seen a 22 percent increase in the number of calls for assistance, its call center having received 27,570 calls since the beginning of the year, an increase of more than 5,000 compared to the same period last year. The most common needs were food, rent, and medical assistance.

The Community Food Bank of Central Alabama expects to ship more than 10 million pounds of food this year, compared to about 9 million last year, Executive Director Larry Logan told *al.com*, a news website.

Kristina Scott, executive director of the Alabama Poverty Project, told *Epoch Times* that a family of four living on \$22,000 a year—the official cutoff point used by the government—has a hard time obtaining basic daily needs.

Scott explained that a family of four needs at least \$44,000 a year just to meet basic needs and \$66,000 dollars a year to be financially secure.

“Every single day is an immediate emergency for a person in poverty,” she said.

“For a person in poverty there is no safety net to fall back on. For example, last week my car had a flat tire. I could deal with it because I had the resources to deal with my car’s flat tire. But if you do not have those resources, like a savings or a credit card, it would be hard to deal with. It really is catastrophic for that person. If in poverty, you would have to make a choice between paying rent and getting a new tire. Of course, you would need a new tire because the next worry would be how to get to work,” said Scott.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact