

US Census figures show jump in child poverty

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Figures released by the US Census Bureau indicate an official child poverty rate of 21.6 percent, the highest since the specific surveys of child poverty began in 2001.

The report comes from the American Community Survey, a nationwide study that includes an annual sample size of about 3 million addresses across the United States, including every county in every state as well as Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey.

The highlights of the latest survey, for the year 2010, show that 15.75 million children lived in poverty and that more than 1.1 million children had been added to the total between 2009 and 2010.

Black children, as has been the case historically, had the highest poverty rate, at 38.2 percent. Poverty among Hispanic children was 32.3 percent.

The number and percentage of children in poverty increased in 27 of the 50 states during this period, and no state saw the number or percent of children in poverty decrease. Ten states had child poverty rates of 25 percent or higher, with the highest rates reported in Mississippi (32.5 percent), the District of Columbia (30.4 percent) and New Mexico (30.0 percent).

The child poverty rate has trended upward in the past 10 years. After falling slightly in the years 2006-2008, it has shot up following the 2008 financial collapse, rising 1.8 percentage points between 2008 and 2009 and then another 1.6 in the following year. It is now more than 20 percent for the first time since the surveys began.

About one out of every three children in poverty lived in the four most populous states of the country—California, Texas, Florida and New York. In these states, hard hit by the financial crash and the ongoing deindustrialization, a total of 5.6 million children are in this category. As the official survey admits, “Children who live in poverty, especially

young children, are more likely than their peers to have cognitive and behavioral difficulties, to complete fewer years of education, and, as they grow up, to experience more years of unemployment.”

The official poverty rate among children is, according to the Census, determined by comparing annual income to a set of threshold dollar values that vary by family size, number of children and age of householder. If the given family’s income is less than that threshold value, the individuals in it are considered below the poverty level. The thresholds are based on a cost of living that is calculated using the Consumer Price Index, which is very widely considered to understate the actual expenses for families, including housing, health care and other needs. Food costs, which have historically been stable and in some cases trailed the overall rate of inflation, have jumped drastically for many necessities in the last several years.

The latest ACS survey of child poverty follows other recent data released by the Census Bureau, including a revised measure showing a 16.1 percent national poverty rate, compared to a rate of 15.2 percent. The Census reported 49.1 million in poverty, but also acknowledged that nearly double that figure, 98 million, or almost one third of the US population, is either poor or just above the poverty level.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, President Franklin Roosevelt, seeking to save the capitalist system, declared in his second inaugural address, in January 1937, “I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clothed and ill-nourished.” This famous phrase, associated with the heyday of American liberalism, was delivered literally in the midst of the famous Flint sit-down strike, in the midst of a period of mass struggles and union organization.

Today, as the census figures attest, it would be no exaggeration to say that nearly one third of the nation struggles with many of the same issues as those of 75

years ago. But the current Democratic occupant of the White House, presiding over crisis-ridden and declining American capitalism, is completely silent on fighting poverty. Instead, the White House and congressional Democrats are engaged in behind-the-scenes negotiations with the Republican leadership to decide how many additional cuts will be made in programs like food stamps, unemployment benefits, Medicare, Medicaid and other life-and-death necessities for the working class, retirees and the poor.

The current stalemate on the so-called supercommittee of Congress revolves around how much to cut from these programs. Not a single voice has been raised among the big business politicians for a genuine war on poverty and homelessness. Instead, they argue over whether the savage cuts are to be “balanced” by some token tax increases on the wealthy. This shows in the clearest possible fashion that the task of fighting poverty can only be taken forward through the independent political struggle of the working class, in a bitter fight against the Democratic Party and all of the institutions of big business.



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