

Report reveals deteriorating social conditions in Wisconsin

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The scope of the social crisis in the Midwestern state of Wisconsin is revealed in a recent report, “The State of Working Wisconsin 2012,” released by the Center on Wisconsin Strategy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

While the overall unemployment rate has dropped from a peak of 9.2 percent in July of 2010, it remains double what it was in 2000. This year has seen the state’s unemployment rate trending upward, rising from a recent low of 6.7 percent in April to 7.5 percent in August. Since the year 2000, long-term unemployment has tripled from 1 percent to 3 percent.

As of July 2012, Wisconsin had a deficit of nearly a quarter million jobs, this being the number of jobs required to make up for population growth and job losses since the onset of the 2008 recession. In December 2007, there were nearly 2.88 million jobs in the state; this number was down to 2.72 million jobs by the middle of this year.

Median income for a family of four in Wisconsin, adjusted for inflation, fell \$8,500 between 2000 and 2010. This follows the trend for family income nationally, marking the first time in six decades that median family income has fallen. At the same time, the number of Wisconsinites earning poverty wages grew to one out of every five.

Young people and African Americans have been the most severely affected by the economic crisis. One out of every four young workers between the ages of 16 and 24 is either unemployed or underemployed. A full quarter of African Americans workers earn poverty wages. One third of black workers were either unemployed or underemployed in 2011. Additionally, the median wage for black women in 2011 (\$13.67) was over three dollars less than the state’s median wage (\$16.84). According to the report, these

conditions are among the worst for black workers anywhere in the United States.

In a clear illustration of the wage stagnation facing workers, the report notes that, adjusted for inflation, the state’s median wage in 2011 was only one dollar higher than it was in 1979. This is the reward for a workforce whose productivity has increased dramatically over the past three decades.

Construction has been the one of the hardest hit sectors of Wisconsin’s economy, with the state losing nearly 35 percent of its construction jobs between December 2007 and July 2012.

While manufacturing has seen the greatest growth over the past year and a half, with job losses hitting bottom in late 2009, the employment numbers pale in comparison to a decade ago. Since 2000, the state has lost a quarter of its manufacturing jobs, down to 450,000 from 600,000.

Workers in Wisconsin face not only stagnant wages and high unemployment but also a state government that is dedicated to austerity for public education while dramatically building up its prison system. Last month the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported that 2011 marked the first year in which public funding for prisons and correctional facilities exceeded funding for the University of Wisconsin System.

The 2011-2013 state budget allocated approximately \$2.1 billion for public universities, while the Department of Corrections was given \$2.25 billion. While not accounting for inflation, funding for prisons grew by a whopping 620 percent between 1990 and 2012. Wisconsin’s prison population grew more than threefold between 1990 and 2011, from under 7,000 to over 22,000.

This is the culmination of a more than 20-year trend that has seen continuous cuts to funding for the

Wisconsin state university system and a steady growth in the size of the Department of Corrections budget, in which Democrats and Republicans have played an equal hand.



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