

# One in two children impoverished after “economic recovery” in upstate New York

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Every other child in Syracuse and other upstate New York cities is growing up in poverty. A staggering one out of every five children five and under is growing up in extreme poverty four years into the so-called economic recovery. At the same time, at 8.9 percent, unemployment is still higher now than in 2008.

Many working people in these cities and towns are suffering from chronic long term underemployment and unemployment, as well as above average rates of poverty. The social conditions have not improved in the past five years, despite the so-called “recovery”. Prior cuts to safety net programs and the continuation of the “sequestration” cuts agreed to in ending the federal government’s shutdown are intensifying austerity’s bite.

Syracuse is leading the state in poverty, according to reports issued by the US Census Bureau and the Fiscal Policy Institute. A full 38 percent of the city’s residents are living below the official poverty level of \$23,550 for a family of four. There are also entire census tracts that are mired in extreme poverty, defined as families living on less than half the official poverty rate, or less than \$11,775 a year.

Over the 5-year period from 2007 to 2011 the US Census Bureau reports the rate of poverty in Syracuse at 32.3 percent. Though the poverty rate in the surrounding suburbs of Onondaga County is less severe, there are several communities where the rate exceeds 20 percent, considerably higher than the national average of 15 percent.

For children the situation is unspeakable. The childhood poverty rate for Syracuse was 54.7 percent in 2012. Rochester’s rate for children is approaching 50 percent. Emphasizing the impossible job situation facing young workers, fully 50 percent of young people age 18-24 are living in poverty and over 30 percent are

living in extreme poverty.

The miserable social conditions are common to other areas in the upstate New York region. Utica, a city with a population of 62,000, has a 29 percent poverty rate, while Binghamton, with 47,000 people, has a rate of 30 percent, which is well above the 14.5 percent average for New York State. Although Ithaca has a lower unemployment rate, 5.6 percent in August according to the New York State Department of Labor, this doesn’t translate into a reduction in poverty. The poverty rate in Ithaca remains relatively high, at 15.5 percent. This underscores the fact that many of the employment opportunities are low-income and are not improving conditions for workers.

The WSWS spoke with Monica in Syracuse recently. She is like many other young people who have seen none of the benefits from the so-called Obama recovery. They are facing insecurity in food, housing and educational opportunities. Monica said, “I have been looking for work for the past 2 years and have only been able to find part-time, minimum wage work. I’ve been living on public assistance, which does not help with getting training or higher education.”

A recent article in The Post Standard in Syracuse interviewed working mom Meghan Fry, who has a full-time retail position earning near the minimum wage, but still must use the SNAP program, more commonly known as food stamps, as a backup. The government shutdown and resulting cuts will raise food insecurity for many low-wage workers like Fry, who said, “I feel like the system should help someone like me.”

While the poverty rate in New York City and other downstate areas is not as high, many experts point out that the official poverty rate is being masked by slightly higher wage rates but that when the higher cost of living is considered, many more people are living

below the poverty line.

The average duration of unemployment is 37 weeks for all of New York, and much longer in Syracuse and other upstate cities. Yet benefits for the unemployed are being cut this month by 7.2 percent, or \$30, from the maximum benefit of \$405 per week. New York already has one of the lowest unemployment benefits levels in the country.

Comments posted online in response to the two abovementioned reports express the outrage felt by most people throughout the region. One person who identified himself as mrcranky57 wrote: “Does it occur to people who speak about the so-called recovery that there was no recovery? It’s not only about Syracuse, it applies to the USA in general. The unemployment numbers are a figment of someone’s imagination established only to make people who are incapable of thinking for themselves believe things are better than they are. If the media would discontinue their propaganda and speak actual facts people would understand just how bad the economy and the USA conditions are.”

An older worker noted the decline in industry. “There was a time when Syracuse had factories in virtually every industry group, from automobiles to glass, pottery, musical instruments, iron and steel, chemicals, clothing, candles, typewriters, breweries, you name it. ...The middle class has fewer and fewer job options, those with just a H.S. diploma, once an entry pass, suffer the most”

The capitalist politicians, both Democrats and Republicans, have no answer for these miserable social conditions. While millions suffer from unemployment, declining wages and pauperization, the picture is very rosy for the wealthiest, who only continue to get richer. It is only through the socialist reorganization of society that workers can safeguard their own future.



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