

Child poverty at devastating levels in US cities and states

Patrick Martin
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Reports issued over the past week suggest that child poverty in America is more widespread than at any time in the last 50 years. For all the claims of economic “recovery” in the United States, the reality for the new generation of the working class is one of ever-deeper social deprivation.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation publishes the annual Kids Count report on child poverty, which was the source of state-by-state reports issued last week. These reports use the new Supplemental Poverty Measure, developed by the Census Bureau, which includes the impact of government benefit programs like food stamps and unemployment compensation, as well as state social programs, and accounts for variations in the cost of living as well.

The result is a picture of the United States with a markedly different regional distribution of child poverty than usually presented. The state with the highest child poverty rate is California, the most populous, at a staggering 27 percent, followed by neighboring Arizona and Nevada, each at 22 percent.

The child poverty rate of California is much higher than figures previously reported, because the cost of living in the state is higher. Moreover, many of the poorest immigrant families are not enrolled in federal social programs because they are undocumented or face language barriers. The same conditions apply in Arizona and Nevada.

The other major centers of child poverty in the United States are the long-impoorished states of the rural Deep South, and the more recently devastated states of the industrial Midwest, where conditions of life for the working class have deteriorated the most rapidly over the past ten years.

It is a remarkable fact, documented in a separate report issued February 23 by the Catholic charity Bread

for the World, that African-American child poverty rates are actually worse in the Midwest states of Iowa, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana than in the traditionally poorest parts of the Deep South, including Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama.

Several of the Midwest states have replaced Mississippi at the bottom of one or another social index. Iowa has the worst poverty rate for African-American children. Indiana has the highest rate of teens attempting or seriously considering suicide.

The most remarkable transformation is in Michigan, once the center of American industry with the highest working-class standard of living of any state. Michigan is the only major US state whose overall poverty rate is actually worse now than in 1960.

This half-century of decline is a devastating indictment of the failure of the American trade unions, which have collaborated in the systematic impoverishment of the working class in what was once their undisputed stronghold.

The United Auto Workers, in particular, did nothing as dozens of plants were shut down and cities like Detroit, Pontiac, Flint and Saginaw were laid waste by the auto bosses. Meanwhile, the UAW became a billion-dollar business, its executives controlling tens of billions in pension and benefit funds, while the rank-and-file workers lost their jobs, their homes and their livelihoods.

In Detroit, once the industrial capital of the world’s richest country, the child poverty rate was 59 percent in 2012, up from 44.3 percent in 2006.

The social catastrophe facing the population in Detroit also exposes the role of the Democratic Party and the organizations around it that have for decades promoted identity politics—according to which race, and not class, is the fundamental social category in

America. The city, like many throughout the region, has been run by a layer of black politicians who have overseen the shocking decay in the social position of African-American workers and youth. (See, "Half a million children in poverty in Michigan".)

Cleveland, also devastated by steel and auto plant closings, was the only other major US city with a child poverty rate of over 50 percent.

The Detroit figure undoubtedly understates the social catastrophe in the Motor City, since it comes from a study concluded before the state-imposed emergency manager put the city into bankruptcy in the summer of 2013, leading to drastic cuts in wages, benefits and pensions for city workers and retirees.

Wayne County, which includes Detroit, had the highest child poverty rate of any of Michigan's 82 counties. Southeast Michigan, which includes the entire Detroit metropolitan area, endured an overall rise in child poverty rates from 18.9 percent in 2006 to 27 percent in 2012.

The state-by-state reports issued by Kids Count were accompanied by a press release by the Casey Foundation noting that the child poverty rate in the United States would nearly double, from 18 percent to 33 percent, without social programs like food stamps, school meals, Medicaid and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

This was issued as a warning of the effect of widely expected budget cuts in these critical programs. It coincided with the first hearing before the House Agriculture Committee on plans to attack the federal food stamp program by imposing work requirements and other restrictions to limit eligibility.

The food stamp program has already suffered through two rounds of budget cuts agreed on in bipartisan deals between the Obama White House and congressional Republicans, which cut \$1 billion and \$5 billion respectively from the program. Now that Republicans control both houses of Congress, they will press for even more sweeping cuts in a program that helps feed 47 million low-income people, many of them children.



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