

Working and poor

The growl about executive compensation and profits at the expense of American jobs can't get loud enough. It is way overdue. So is the revival of organized labor. Some day soon we're going to hit a critical mass and fix the great inequities -- the lousy wages, the lack of benefits, the incessant cost cutting and staff reductions to increase profit margins. For their stubborn resistance on the minimum wage alone, the Republicans are getting what they deserve. Here's the latest from American's post-welfare, post-Reaganomics, almost-post Bush era: More than one in four working families -- a total of 42 million adults and children -- are low-income, earning too little to meet their basic needs.

"Still Working Hard, Still Falling Short," a report produced by the Working Poor Families Project, found that an additional 350,000 working families were low-income in 2006 compared to 2002.

The report also found increasing income inequality, with a widening gap between the share of income the highest-earning families receive and that earned by the least affluent. "This increase in income disparity and in the number of low-income working families came during a period of economic expansion, suggesting that those numbers will continue to grow during this economic downturn," the report said.

"Still Working Hard, Still Falling Short" was produced by the Working Poor Families Project, a national initiative supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Joyce, and C.S. Mott Foundations to examine the conditions of America's working families.

"Low-income working families pay a higher percentage of their income for housing than other working families and are far less likely to have health insurance," according to the report. "At the same time, low-income working families work hard. Adults in low-income working families worked an average of 2,552 hours per year in 2006, the equivalent of almost one and a quarter full-time workers per family. . . . Inadequate education plays a major role in preventing low-income workers from climbing the economic ladder. While almost half of all job openings require more than a high school education, 88 million adult workers are not prepared for these positions.

"The federal government has a role and responsibility to ensure that all hard-working families have a true opportunity for economic advancement and success," according to the report, which made four recommendations for federal policies to improve education, wages and job quality.

Additional report findings include:

- * In 13 states, 33 percent or more of working families are low-income, while in Mississippi and New Mexico, more than 40 percent of working families are low-income.
- * In 2006, California and Texas had more than a million low-income working families, while Florida and New York each had more than half a million.
- * In 13 states, 50 percent or more of minority working families are low-income.
- * Nationally, more than one in five jobs -- 22 percent -- pays wages that fall below the federal poverty threshold. In eight states, more than a third of all jobs are in poverty-wage occupations.

For more information go to www.workingpoorfamilies.org.

Posted by [Dan Rodricks](#) on October 15, 2008 8:56 AM

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