

# Standard of living growth slows

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United Press International  
WASHINGTON — The American standard of living — long considered one of the wonders of the world — is in trouble.  
For the past century, each generation of Americans — except during

the Great Depression — has become accustomed to a standard of living roughly double that of the generation immediately before it.  
Between 1890 and 1970 the nation's output of goods and services per person, adjusted for inflation,

more than quadrupled, while average number of working hours declined by 50 percent.

The average American income, after taxes and inflation, has tripled since the Depression of the 1930s.

—The average American's life expectancy has increased by five years since 1950.

—The percentage of families with incomes below the poverty level was halved, from 18 percent in 1960 to 9 percent in 1977.

—In 1950, somewhat more than

than 20 fold between 1950 and 1978.

But Americans cannot take these rising expectations for granted forever.

In recent years the growth of America's material standard of living appears to have slowed.

While during the 1950s and 1960s it was rising rapidly by almost any measure, whether it has risen at all in the last few years depends on how you measure it. And measuring it isn't easy.

"In the past year there has been a substantial deterioration in the standard of living of the average worker," says Rudy Oswald, research director for the AFL-CIO.

Last year, Oswald said, consumer prices rose more than 13 percent, but wages rose only 8 percent, so the average worker was 5 percent worse off in purchasing power.

The Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics has tried since 1947 to keep track of the "real, spendable earnings" — after federal

Last year, Rudy Oswald, research director for the AFL-CIO, said, consumer prices rose only 8 percent, but wages rose only 3 percent, so the average worker was 5 percent worse off in purchasing power.

taxes and inflation — of the average blue collar worker, representing about three-fifths of the work force.

Its figures say that a worker's purchasing power rose 23 percent in the 1950s and 13 percent in the 1960s but declined 2 percent from 1970 through 1979 and fell 5 percent dur-

ing 1979 alone.

But BLS itself says these figures are misleading.

For one thing, they are based on the taxes of a "typical" family that no longer is typical — a working father, nonworking wife and two dependent children.

The Census Bureau says both husband and wife now work for a living in half the nation's husband-and-wife households.

Also, according to Dudley Young of BLS, the wages measured by BLS do not represent this hypothetical

"Whatever measure you use, last year was terrible," says Lawrence Chimerine, chairman of Chase Econometrics. "And the performance over the last 5 or 6 years has been way below what it was historically."

Family income figures have been seen in the light of what has been happening to the American family is getting smaller, decreasing to an average of 3.54 persons in 1978.

At the same time, there are more workers per family. Both men and women are working for a living, a 1960. In 1979, it was 48 percent of husband-and-wife families.

Penner also notes that, while income housewives earn at work measured in the standard of living, "The product they lose by leaving the household is not netted out."

While consumer prices rose 13 percent overall last year, he notes that the prices of necessities rose 17.6 percent — including a 37.4 percent increase in shelter (14.1 percent, food 10.2 percent and health care 10.1 percent).

These four items comprise one-third of the household budget, four out of five American families, Alperovitz said.

Going one step further, Chimerine says the discretionary income of Americans — after they have met these necessities, and adjusted for inflation — fell in 1979 below level reached in 1973.

Union workers have done better than non-union in this struggle. Employment cost to business of union employees rose 8.4 percent fiscal 1979, according to the Council on Wage and Price Stability, but that for nonunion workers rose 10 percent.

The picture isn't one-sided, some ways, not measured by the figures, Americans are better off.

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