US workers without high school diplomas hit hard by recession

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Workers in the US with less education have been hard hit by unemployment and low wages, since June 2009, the date named by the National Bureau of Economic Research as the "official" end of the recession in mid-2009.

Figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) show that workers who do not finish high school make on average about $23,400 a year, while those with high school diplomas make $33,500. Both compare poorly to those with a four-year college degree, who average $54,700, the bureau found.

Drawing on these statistics, a recent article from the *Wall Street Journal* notes that by 2020 there will be 6 million more workers without high school diplomas than there will be jobs available to them, according to a 2011 McKinsey Global Institute study. This is mainly due to the fact that industries that normally hire less-educated workers, such as construction and low-end manufacturing, have continued to decline in the recession.

Unemployment remains high for the less educated. While the official jobless rate for those with college degrees stands at 4.2 percent, this compares to an 8.4 percent jobless rate for those without a high school diploma, which is slightly higher than the national rate. Youth unemployment is particularly high, 23.2 percent, according to BLS figures.

Lawmakers have reacted to unemployment among the poorly educated in a predictably reactionary way, blaming the lack of education in the workforce in general as the reason for high unemployment. Some politicians have even demanded that those without diplomas obtain a GED (general equivalency diploma) as a precondition for receiving jobless benefits. This is under conditions where public schools, particularly in poorer districts, are starved for cash, teachers are vilified, and students pay the price.

In a similar vein, a recent article in the *Washington Post* made the claim that as many as 600,000 manufacturing jobs were vacant for want of experienced personnel to take them. However, BLS data show that fewer than 250,000 jobs are in fact being offered in manufacturing industries, a number several times smaller than the total reported demand for work among unemployed but qualified workers.

In line with the media vilification of the unemployed are the current efforts of the Obama administration to transform many working class community colleges into training platforms for low-wage industries.

Speaking recently at Northern Virginia Community College in Annandale, Virginia, Obama addressed a crowd of students, stating, "My administration is helping community colleges redesign training programs, so students can learn the skills that are most in demand in industries like health care sciences and advanced manufacturing."

North Carolina, for example, spent more than $1 million to design a curriculum to train workers for a Caterpillar plant, and a local community college agreed to develop a $4.3 million curriculum to assist in this training.

This act has been repeated across the country. Responsibility for training formerly carried out by corporations has been shoveled onto the backs of taxpayers in an effort to make the private sector more profitable. This is accompanied by the lowering of living standards for vulnerable sections of the working class to maintain the overall race to the bottom utilized by American capitalism to its benefit against its economic rivals globally.

The worsening conditions faced by workers without a

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high school diploma are one more indication of the fraudulent claims by the Obama administration and the media that an economic recovery is under way in the United States.

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