

US college grads confront the dead end of the profit system

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Amid endless claims of economic recovery by the Obama administration and the media, the conditions facing the working class in the United States continue to deteriorate. This is seen nowhere more clearly than in the fate of young people, who confront a future of unemployment, low-paying jobs and perpetual debt.

The Associated Press reported Sunday that more than half (53.6 percent) of all four-year college graduates under 25 in the US are either unemployed or underemployed—that is, without a job or working at a job that does not require their degree. This is the highest percentage since records began being kept 11 years ago.

Of the 1.5 million people in this category, about half are unemployed and the other half are working for low wages at retail stores, coffee shops, restaurants, etc. The report also noted that only three of the 30 jobs with the largest projected number of openings in the next eight years will require a bachelor's degree or higher.

Overall youth unemployment in the US is over 23 percent, and after three years of official economic “recovery,” the rates of underemployment and unemployment for this group are still rising. The dire employment situation for young people is being used to pit them against older workers. In many cases, companies have laid off workers with decades of experience and replaced them with better-educated workers at half the pay.

The same students who cannot find decent-paying jobs that offer the prospect of economic security and advancement are saddled with huge college debts. The average student debt level topped \$25,000 this year and the total amount surpassed \$1 trillion.

The conditions facing the younger generation are a barometer of the overall health of a social system. A society that condemns its youth to a standard of living

that is worse than their parents is a society that is going backwards. Ritualistic references by politicians to the “American Dream” have no relationship to reality.

The political establishment has nothing to offer the younger generation. President Barack Obama will kick off a three-state tour of college campuses this week, seeking to appeal to young voters with a token demand that Congress lower interest rates on a fraction of student loans. In his appearances at University of North Carolina, the University of Colorado and the University of Iowa, Obama will demagogically call for Congress to keep the rates on subsidized Stafford loans from going up to 6.5 percent on July 1.

The proposal is trivial when compared to the enormous levels of debt born by graduates. It would affect only subsidized government loans—less than one third of all student loans—and would mean only a moderate adjustment in interest rates, with no change in the amount students owe.

All of Obama's proposals on student loans have been coordinated with and vetted by the banks to make sure they do not impinge on their profits. Meanwhile, Obama has overseen the cutting of federal education spending, supported the mass firing of teachers, and spearheaded the slashing of manufacturing wages. He has made no proposals to seriously address mass unemployment, poverty or home foreclosures.

At the center of the crisis facing young people is not simply the policies of one administration, however, but a social and economic system dedicated to the profit interests of the corporate and financial elite. Both of the official parties, the Democrats and Republicans, represent a ruling class that is seeking to resolve the crisis of capitalism by destroying the living standards of working people.

This is an international phenomenon. The millions of

young workers without a future were the major driving force of last year's upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia and mass protests throughout Europe. In Spain and Greece, mired in depression, youth unemployment approaches 50 percent.

This is only the beginning. Ever more brutal austerity measures are leading to a renewed crisis in Europe. In the United States, the ruling class is preparing to slash domestic social spending as a percentage of the gross domestic product to its lowest level in decades, regardless of who is elected.

The social upheavals of 2011 are only a forerunner of what is to come. But the struggles of young people must be informed by a political and class program. Jerry White and Phyllis Scherrer are running as the Socialist Equality Party's candidates in the 2012 elections to fight for such a program. They are demanding the abolition of all student debts and a guarantee of free, high-quality education for all. They are further calling for a multi-trillion-dollar public works program to rebuild the social infrastructure, expand cultural opportunities and provide good-paying jobs for all.

To secure these social rights requires a transformation in the organization of society in the US and on a world scale. The banks and major corporations must be nationalized and placed under the democratic control of the working class. A radical redistribution of wealth must be carried out, freeing up the resources needed to guarantee a future for all young people.

There is no way to defend the rights of working people and youth—the right to a job, to an education, to a future without war—within the framework of the two big business parties and the capitalist system they defend. The fight for a future for young people is the fight for socialism.

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