

A lost generation and the struggle for socialism

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As schools and universities start the new school year across North America and Europe, young people face rising mass unemployment, renewed attacks on public education, and growing poverty.

Last week the European Union's statistics agency announced that the unemployment rate for EU residents under 25 hit 22.5 percent. Greece and Spain, both reeling from the euro crisis, had youth unemployment rates above 50 percent.

By all indications, mass unemployment will only worsen in the foreseeable future. The global unemployment rate for young people will hit 12.9 percent by 2017, up 0.2 percent from the estimate for 2012, according to a report issued Monday by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The ILO notes that in developed countries, youth unemployment is expected to fall slightly in coming years, but only because millions of young people will simply leave the labor force.

Amid the growth of youth joblessness, the renewed assault on education has an especially disastrous impact. The combined effect of youth unemployment and education cuts is creating a growing section of young people who are neither working nor in school, and whose prospects for a career are dwindling every day.

This year, British universities doubled their tuition, pricing hundreds of thousands of young people out of an education. Applications to British universities dropped nearly eight percent, as hundreds of thousands of students simply could not afford to attend.

In the United States, public education is likewise being starved. State and local education funding has plunged since 2008, according to a study published Wednesday by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

The CBPP report found that seventeen states cut per-student education spending by more than 10 percent since 2008; three cut spending by over 20 percent. California, the most populous state, slashed per-pupil spending by 17 percent, while Illinois and Texas cut it 11 percent. Since 2008, local school districts have eliminated more than 328,000 jobs, the report noted.

Those young people lucky enough to find work increasingly do so at poverty wages. A recent report by the National Employment Law Project found that low-wage jobs, paying between \$7.69 and \$13.83, constituted the majority of jobs created in the US since the 2008 crash.

By contrast, medium-wage jobs—which made up 60 percent of the job losses during the economic downturn—represented only 22 percent of job growth during the “economic recovery.” The combination of skyrocketing tuition and falling wages has put a college education beyond the reach of millions. For those who do attend, it increasingly means a lifetime of indebtedness.

This situation is sparking fears in the ruling class of a “lost generation” thoroughly disillusioned with the capitalist system. Guy Ryder, the incoming ILO director-general, warned in the *Financial Times* that the present levels of mass unemployment are “a socially unacceptable situation and, to a certain degree, a danger to our society.”

As a defender of the political establishment, he is right to be concerned. The disastrous conditions confronting young people have already contributed to mass social movements, from the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 to the Quebec student strike this year.

But these struggles, which gave partial expression to the demands of young people for a decent life, have

confronted the basic problem facing the working class as a whole: the need for a revolutionary leadership.

Pervasive youth unemployment and the assault on public education are not aberrations. They are the result of the capitalist system, which subordinates all aspects of life to the generation of profits for the rich. At the same time, the ruling class utilizes the desperate situation facing young people as a battering ram against the wages and benefits of older workers, and to impoverish the population as a whole.

The struggle for the future of the youth is the struggle against capitalism and for socialism. Only by taking up this perspective, and breaking with any attempt to patch over the decrepit capitalist system, can the struggle be taken forward to defend the social interests of youth and students.

The natural ally of students and young people in their efforts to defend their living standards is the working class. Only by uniting their struggle to defend public education and for decent jobs with a mass movement of the working class can young people hope to defend their futures.

In the new semester, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the student movement of the Socialist Equality Party, is launching an aggressive campaign to build a movement of young people based on a socialist program and an orientation to the working class.

We call on all students and young people to take up the fight for socialism, study the history and perspectives of the Socialist Equality Party, and join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality!

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