

UK youth face bleak job prospects in 2013

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The number of unemployed young people aged 16-25 in the United Kingdom is predicted to climb once again, according to a study by the Labour Party-linked Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR). During the autumn of 2011, the figure hit one million, one-in-five young people, for the first time since the 1980s.

The IPPR study predicts that approximately 86,000 more workers under the age of 25 will be without jobs this year—a total of 1.05 million—with no signs of improvement on the horizon.

The worst-affected regions are predicted to be the North West with 64,000 additional jobless youth, London with 53,000, and Yorkshire and the Humber with 23,000.

Many of these unemployed youth are recent graduates. Studies report that only 62 percent of last year's students found a job within six months of leaving university. Many of those who do are often forced into unskilled jobs at low wages.

Long-term youth unemployment has also risen by 23 percent since 2010 according to a study conducted by the Trades Union Congress. The North West region was the hardest-hit, with 26,000 more young people out of work for over six months—a rise of 53 percent. Long-term youth unemployment has doubled since 2008 and increased eightfold since 2000.

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat government claims there has been an explosion of “job-creation” during the past year but the figures show that this is largely based around a rise in part-time and insecure jobs. The number of part-time workers rose by 49,000 in recent months to 8.1 million—one in five of the working population—while an additional 72,000 workers entered temporary jobs, bringing the total to 655,000.

The ruling class is placing the burden of the economic crisis on the backs of workers, focusing their attacks on the most vulnerable. Young people claiming

Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) will see their payments fall by approximately 10 percent as part of a 1 percent annual cap on welfare benefit increments imposed last month. This follows the withdrawal of Housing Benefit payments to under-25s and cuts to support for unemployed youth—funding for which has fallen by a quarter due to £98 million spending cuts.

The aim is to force young people onto unpaid workfare placements and supposed “training courses”, which account for one-fifth of all “new jobs”. Workfare schemes were ruled legal last August by the High Court and have forced thousands of unemployed workers into unpaid labour under threat of losing their JSA. The extent of these schemes is unknown due to undisclosed government deals with private sector providers.

The government's new Youth Contract, which replaces previous youth schemes, provides no support to young workers but instead subsidises private companies to induce them to provide jobs.

Bleak job prospects come at a time when the option of studying is out of reach for most, with the average degree student facing £53,000 of debts, and an uncertain future after graduation.

Unpaid internships, although illegal, are becoming necessary to enter some sectors. One-in-five young people, in the hope of securing employment, have agreed to work for nothing at some time. This erects a further financial barrier to working class youth, as those from wealthier families are three times more likely to have done unpaid work according to a recent study by the National Union of Students.

Employers use these internships to exploit youth and attack workplace entitlements. Interns are commonly forced to forgo any personal commitments and work longer hours.

Apprenticeships are virtually non-existent. Over 1,100,000 applications were made for just 106,510

apprenticeship positions on the National Apprenticeship Service website, which lists 80 percent of total placements, during 2012. There are more than ten applicants competing for every place.

Those fortunate enough to get a place must survive on an average wage of £170 per week, with the minimum wage for apprentices set at £2.65 per hour, just over half the derisory national minimum wage for the same age group.

Business Secretary Vince Cable recently called for an “earn or learn” programme for school leavers as part of a new coalition agreement that would force youth to study or work under threat of losing their benefit entitlements. He has called for an increase in the number of apprenticeships and for them to be held in the same esteem as university education.

This political posturing is part of the increasing demonisation by the British elite of the unemployed as “shirkers” to obscure the scarcity of decent-paying jobs. Government figures show an increase of over 70 percent in the number of apprenticeships since the ruling coalition came to power. However, 40 percent of these are accounted for by companies retraining existing staff, mostly aged over 25, and many other positions are merely low-paid, unskilled roles in the service sector.

These conditions are leaving youth feeling unable to cope with their circumstances. According to a Prince’s Trust report, depression affects a third of in-work youth and half of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET). More than one-in-ten of these young people felt they could find no way to solve their problems. In another report, the charity found that one quarter of young people from poor backgrounds hold no hope of getting a good job or gaining a decent standard of living as adults.

Similar circumstances face young people across Europe, where the average unemployment rate is an unprecedented 23.7 percent for this age group. In Greece and Spain the majority of young people are out of work, with youth unemployment recently surpassing 56 percent in both countries.

According to the Labour-oriented Work Foundation, youth unemployment in the UK is now third only to Greece and Spain in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. The figure is approaching an unprecedented 40 percent

in Italy and Portugal and 30 percent in Eastern European countries, including Slovakia and Latvia.

Youth unemployment in the UK has climbed faster than any other country in the G8 since 2008, up by 35 percent in the years to 2011, compared to an average of 15 percent in the G8.

Responsible for this intolerable situation facing young people are the various pseudo-left parties that provide a left cover for the trade union bureaucracy, which works systematically to demobilise any opposition to rising unemployment and austerity.

Opposed to politically organising young people for a fight against the capitalist profit system, organisations such as the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party’s “Youth Fight for Jobs” are based around single-issue protest campaigns, based on pressuring the government or local Labour Party-run councils. In every instance, they hold out the bankrupt illusion that the trade unions can be made to take up a struggle for the young unemployed.



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