

A political answer to youth unemployment in Europe

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The real state of any society finds its clearest expression in the perspective it offers youth. The relentless rise of youth unemployment in Europe further demonstrates the bankruptcy of the capitalist system.

One in four young people in the European Union (EU) are unemployed. In certain countries, such as Greece and Spain, the rate is even higher than 50 percent. These figures contrast with the grotesque enrichment of a narrow layer at the top of society. The richest 1 percent of the German population now owns more than a third of all net financial assets, more than the poorest 90 percent.

Despite great technological advances, the profit system has nothing to offer young people other than unemployment, poverty and war. Youth who still have a job mostly receive a pittance. Hundreds of thousands are forced to accept internships and temporary contracts, working for poverty wages. Schools, universities and training centres are to be privatised, closed or destroyed through austerity measures. The latest figures show that child labour in Greece has once again become a mass phenomenon.

These inhuman conditions reveal the incompatibility of the basic needs of the people with the profit interests of the super-rich who dominate all aspects of social life. In the wake of the financial crisis, all the gains of the working class—in terms of wages, health and education provisions—are being sacrificed to preserve the profits of the banks and corporations.

Today, there is no one in the political establishment who advances a serious solution to youth joblessness. On the contrary, German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), as well as Italian prime minister Enrico Letta (Democratic Party) and the president of France, François Hollande

(Socialist Party), call for the wages of young people to be further reduced in order to increase the “competitiveness” of the national economy. Moreover, they have committed themselves to further austerity measures. Against this background, the €6 billion the very same politicians announced for the coming years to help youth are pure hypocrisy.

The brutality and disregard for the youth are the result of irreconcilable social interests. Given the extent of social antagonisms, the question is posed directly today: Which class is to rule society, and according to which principles?

The interests of the majority of young people cannot be realised through appeals to the various government, or the demand for more parliamentary participation. They require a common struggle of all workers for the socialist transformation of society, according to the needs of the people. What’s required is the establishment of a workers’ government, which wrests power from the financial elite, expropriates the banks and big corporations, and places them under democratic control.

Only under the conditions of a rational and democratically planned economy can the situation of young people be improved in the long term. To this end, a massive programme of public investment is needed. Immediately, 6 million well-paid jobs in vital areas such as health, environment and culture must be created. The length of the working week must be reduced to 30 hours in all sectors, with full pay. In addition, an offensive in education is needed, providing people of all ages with a free education up to university level.

Such a socialist policy is not based on the vicissitudes of the market, but on the needs of society as a whole and the inalienable social rights of every human being.

It is based on the right to a comprehensive education, the right to dignified and well-paid work and the right to participate fully in social life.

These principles are categorically opposed to the profit interests of the financial elite who will go to any lengths to defend their privileges. When politicians and the media warn of “social unrest”, or like Schäuble, warn of a “revolution”, they only reveal this conflict of interests more clearly. They are preparing to suppress any resistance to their anti-social policies with police and military violence. In Greece, three strikes have been banned this year using the police and by invoking martial law. The close cooperation of the German secret services with right-wing terrorists—as in the case of the so-called National Socialist Underground (NSU)—point in this direction.

Workers and young people must prepare themselves for this historic social confrontation. They need a revolutionary party that does not beg for charity, but fearlessly opposes the financial elite. This party is the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its German section, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG—Socialist Equality Party).

The ICFI unites working people across all national, ethnic, religious or gender divides. It expresses the independent interests of the working class, and has defended the principles of socialism for decades against social democracy and Stalinism.

The vast majority of young people can only defend their own social interests on the basis of this perspective, and as part of a comprehensive mobilisation of the working class. We therefore appeal to all young people who today face precarious conditions, unemployment and poverty: join the struggle for a socialist society and assist in the building of the PSG and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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