

The EU's fraudulent “call to action” on youth unemployment

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At their summit Thursday in Brussels, the government heads of the European Union decided to provide six billion euros for unemployed youth. The measure is officially described as a “Call to Action on Youth Unemployment.” In fact, it is quite the opposite. It is a travesty and insult to the intelligence of young people and only underscores the fact that an entire generation has no future in a capitalist Europe.

In the 27 member countries of the EU, one in four young people under 25 is officially counted as unemployed—a total of 5.6 million people. The real figure is even higher since the official statistics take into account only those who have been looking for a job within the past four weeks and who can take on a new job within two weeks.

The six billion euros are to be spent over the years 2014 and 2015. This amounts to an average of 45 euros per month per unemployed person, i.e., a drop in the ocean.

Even prominent corporate and political figures conceded that this is a token measure. Thomas Mayer, chief economist at Deutsche Bank, called it “more a form of symbolic politics,” and Martin Schulz, president of the EU Parliament, said the money allocated was “not enough.”

According to the European Commission, about 4.5 trillion euros of public funds have been allocated to prop up the continent's banking system since 2008. Now the same European governments are freeing up 0.13 percent of this sum for European youth. This ratio indicates the relative importance attached by the ruling elite to the youth of Europe as compared to the banks.

The six billion euros is not even new money. Rather, it is to be diverted from other expenditures in the existing budget. After years of haggling on a fiscal framework, the EU summit agreed on Thursday to a

budget for the years 2014-2020 totaling 960 billion euros. This is far less than the sum required to meet current expenses. In order to set aside the six billion euros for unemployed youth, the EU will be forced to make cuts in other outlays, with a corresponding loss of jobs.

The summit did not specify in any detail how the six billion euros are to be used. The only stipulation was that youth should be offered a job or further training within four months of completing their education or being laid off from their current job.

The worthlessness of such guarantees was underlined by the most senior participant at the summit, Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker. He recalled that an EU summit had made an almost identical decision under his chairmanship in 1997—with nothing to show for it.

The EU is expected to finance some training programs to provide temporary relief for young people from the dole queue—only to plunge them into unemployment in an even more brutal fashion at a later date. Such measures have demonstrated in the past that they are incapable of securing permanent employment at a reasonable wage.

In Spain alone, some 2.7 million people under 35 are without work. About 60 percent of them have a university degree, and many have more than one degree. Nevertheless, they cannot find work. In response to a recent advertisement for eleven supervisory posts at the Prado Museum in Madrid, offering a monthly salary of just 930 euros, 18,500 people applied.

In Italy, 40 percent of all young people under 25 and one in five graduates are unemployed. Retraining will do little to improve their prospects. In Greece and Portugal, youth unemployment is as high as 63 percent

and 43 percent respectively.

The makeshift retraining measures are not intended to secure a future for young people, but rather to provide businesses with young recruits to exploit as interns or low-paid temporary workers, while the employers draw government subsidies.

The financial press has stressed the need to enact labor market “reforms” alongside the six-billion-euro youth employment program to facilitate the replacement of older and higher-paid workers with lower-paid and younger workers enlisted into the so-called “training” schemes.

“In order to be more than a subsidy for short-term employment spells, however, the guarantee has to be accompanied by deep reforms in the labour markets of recipient countries,” wrote the *Financial Times*.

In carrying out its token measure, the EU is driven by fear that youth denied a future under the existing system will become radicalized and turn to a socialist perspective. The representative of the right-wing Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Madrid, Thomas Stehling, warned recently that individuals could lose confidence in the present system. “What should one expect from these people?” he asked ironically. “That they run into the streets hailing the success of the social market economy?”

In the *Guardian*, Stefano Scarpetta of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) compared the situation in Europe with the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia. In the latter countries, he noted, there was also a generation of well-educated young people who had no access to the labor market.

In its editorial on the EU summit, the *Financial Times* concluded: “High unemployment is breeding disillusionment among the young. Their discontent has been wind to the sails of protest parties, such as Italy’s Five Star Movement. So far, protests have been rare and mostly non-violent. But this should be no reason for complacency. The EU’s policy-makers need only look at Turkey or Brazil to realise it takes little for disaffection to bring people onto the streets.”

Mass unemployment among adults as well as young people can be overcome only if millions of new, well-paid jobs are created in key social sectors such as health, elderly care, the environment and culture, as well as in industry. This requires massive public

investment.

Such investment cannot be realized as long as control of the social wealth remains in the hands of the financial elite, which has further enriched itself in the course of the crisis. Such measures require the establishment of a workers’ government that expropriates the banks and corporations and places them under democratic, popular control.

Young people must reject the EU program. They must not allow themselves to be exploited as cheap labor and used to depress the wages of all workers. They must fight together with the working class as a whole for the socialist transformation of society. This requires the building of a new international socialist party—the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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