

Surveys of British youth find growing anger and despair

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One in 10 young people in Britain feel they have “nothing to live for.”

This was the disturbing finding of a YouGov poll conducted for the Prince’s Trust that grabbed recent headlines.

Based on interviews with 2,161 16 to 25-year-olds in October and November last year, the Trust pointed out that this statistic, if applied to the entire youth population, would equate to 750,000 people aged between 16 and 25.

In addition, 40 percent of those interviewed had experienced some form of psychological difficulty, including self-loathing and panic attacks over fear as to the future.

The long-term unemployed, unsurprisingly, were more than twice as likely to believe they have nothing to live for. Of those polled, 281 were classed as Neets (not in employment, education or training) and 166 had been unemployed for six months or more. One in three of the long-term jobless had contemplated suicide.

Such experiences are by no means unique to British youth. On a global scale, it is the younger generation that are bearing the full brunt of the fall-out of the 2008 economic crash and the crisis of world capitalism. This makes it all the more grotesque that such a survey was produced for the Prince’s Trust. Headed by Prince Charles, scion of an institution that embodies aristocratic privilege and social inequality, the Trust promotes “self-improvement” for the young.

Adding insult to injury, the YouGov poll results were released simultaneously with the announcement that Prince William, second in line to the throne, had been accepted at Cambridge University. His Royal Highness, the Duke of Cambridge, will undertake a 10-week “bespoke” [custom-made] course in agricultural management, despite grades well below the targets set

for other applicants.

The Prince’s Trust has used the youth survey findings to appeal for support from government and health agencies in funding its work with long-term unemployed young people suffering mental health issues. However, it presents this disturbing trend merely as a public health issue that can be resolved on an individual and case by case basis. Little mention is made in the Trust’s findings of the global economic crisis, much less the vicious austerity measures that have been adopted by every government in its wake.

Throughout Europe, the bourgeoisie is seeking to utilise the crisis to return the working class to the conditions of the early 20th century, or worse. The youth are a deliberate target for attack, to be made to accept a future without decent jobs, health or educational provision.

In countries such as Greece and Spain, the youth unemployment rate is more than 60 percent and rising, as the European bourgeoisie drastically restructure the labour market to this end. But the same process is underway everywhere.

In Britain, one of the first things the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition did when it took office in 2010 was to abolish the Education Maintenance Allowance for poorer working class youth and to triple university tuition fees to £9,000 per annum. The aim was to deliberately cut tens of thousands of young people off from any educational opportunities and to force up youth unemployment so as to drive down wages and conditions.

According to research, nearly half of those who graduated university in the last five years are now employed in non-graduate jobs. Saddled with large tuition debts, many are working for wages significantly lower than the £29,000 per annum once promised as a

graduate starting salary and some even work for nothing on unpaid “internships.”

Those without degrees are being forced into even lower-paid employment, often part-time on zero-hour contracts.

For those without work, the situation is even worse. Almost one million 16 to 24-year-olds are out of work in Britain, with almost half classed as long-term unemployed.

In December Chancellor George Osborne set out plans to further reduce unemployment benefits for the under-25s and end their entitlement to help with housing benefit—moves that will force thousands into poverty and further depress wages. Average wages have already seen a precipitous decline since 2008.

Commenting on Osborne’s budget forecast, the Resolution Foundation noted that the government had pushed back its target for the first full year in which average wages were expected to “recover to pre-recession levels” from 2017 to 2018. The Foundation calculates that the median wage will be lower in 2018 than it was in 2003, with many UK households “likely to have experienced 15 ‘lost years’ on pay.”

The Foundation noted, “If past trends are repeated, median [weekly] male earnings are forecast to reach £520 in 2018—a fall of 8 percent compared to 2008” and that its analysis “suggest that the median [weekly] wage among 22-29 year olds would fall by 10 percent between 2008 and 2018.”

Such a sharp decline caused *Guardian* economic commentator Aditya Chakraborty to note that posterity would record this as a “permanent change in the labour market: Britain aping the American model of stagnation for the average worker but massive returns for bosses and big shareholders.”

In addition, he commented, the offensive against welfare, health and education provision and the jobs, wages and conditions of millions of public sector employees, meant that by 2018, government spending on public services would amount to a share of just 11 percent of national income.

“Certainly,” he concluded, “you have to wonder how long a system can carry on if it offers so little to its young.”

His statement is telling because behind the headline “suicide warning” accompanying the YouGov poll is another story—one not primarily of apathy or despair,

but of mass seething discontent, especially amongst the young.

In December new research by the *Guardian*-ICM documented rising alienation from Britain’s political system, with almost half of those interviewed stating that their predominant attitude towards it was anger. Those aged 18 to 24 were more likely to describe themselves as angry at the current political set up.

This accounts for the outpouring of official outrage over the comments by British comic-actor Russell Brand last year, in which he suggested that young people were not voting out of apathy but due to the “lies, treachery and deceit of the political class that has been going on for generations,” and called for a “revolution.”

More fundamentally, widespread discontent and alienation amongst the young in the UK is the source of the August 2011 riots and the repression meted out by the authorities, as well as the build-up of police-state surveillance exposed by Edward Snowden.

The ruling elite is acutely conscious of the fact that its system can offer nothing to the younger generation except poverty, militarism and war. Far from organising health programmes or any other such assistance for its young victims, it anticipates the inevitable social upheavals by preparing repressive police measures.



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