

Summer joblessness for US teens remains near record levels

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8 July 2015

Six years after the official end of the 2008 recession and the proclamation that the United States was in the midst of an economic “recovery,” employment prospects for teenagers, who traditionally seek temporary employment after schools close for the summer months, remain dire.

“Despite significant improvements in the U.S. labor market and the economy over the past few years, teenagers are still facing Depression Era-like labor market problems,” noted a study published by Drexel University in May.

Since 2000, the share of youth ages 16-19 working during the summer months fell from nearly 52 percent to less than 27 percent today; the largest drop in employment for any age group throughout the period, according to the Drexel report.

Year-round employment for youth dropped from 45 percent to 27 percent since 2000, according to the Labor Department. Employment for those aged 20-24 also plummeted during this period; dropping by 9.8 percent.

Over 3.23 million teenagers wished to work but could not find employment, representing a level of under-employment of more than 40 percent for this age demographic, the highest of any working-age group.

Although there are millions more teenagers today compared to 15 years ago, the number of teens employed in 2014 was 4.5 million, compared to 7.2 million in 2000.

The Drexel report noted that wealthy teens are much more likely to hold jobs over the summer. Less than 20 percent of youth from homes with annual incomes lower than \$20,000 held a job in 2014, compared to 41 percent from homes with incomes of \$100,000 to \$149,000.

The Drexel report notes that despite the fact that

“[w]ork experience provides young people with... desirable behavioral traits... that are important across all occupations and careers in the labor market... It is a sad fact that given such positive impacts of summer employment among teens, the summer job prospects have diminished in the U.S. since the beginning of the decade.”

In recent years, federal budgets passed by Democrats and Republicans have slashed funds to numerous job-training programs benefiting working-class youth.

In 2013 alone, a report by the National Skills Coalition (NSC) found that the federal sequester budget cuts implemented that year slashed at least 25 percent of the funding for 35 percent of all job training and workforce support programs.

New York City, where in 1999 over 82 percent of all funding for youth job programs came from the federal government, now receives no federal money for jobs programs for teenagers. In May, New York City’s Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the further slashing of \$24 million in public grants for the city’s summer youth programs.

A report released by the University of Chicago Crime Lab last year found youth enrolled in that city’s summer work program were 43 percent less likely to be arrested for violent crime. Last weekend, street violence claimed the lives of 7 young people in Chicago, including a seven-year old.

Mass youth unemployment is an international phenomenon. In Spain, youth unemployment stands at 53.2 percent; In Greece, currently wracked by a massive debt crisis, 52.4 percent of young people remain jobless, as do 34.7 percent in Portugal.

A recent report issued by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that the number of youth neither in education,

employment or training (NEET) has reached record levels in developed countries.

The disastrous employment prospects facing teenagers is just one indicator of the ongoing social crisis facing the working class more than six years into the so-called economic “recovery” proclaimed by the Obama administration, which has witnessed an immense growth of poverty and mass unemployment amid the vast enrichment of the US financial oligarchy.

The worth of a society can be measured by the prospects it holds out for young people. By that measure, the conditions facing youth under the present social order stand as an indictment of the capitalist system.



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