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One quarter of world's youth without jobs or education

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21 August 2013

Earlier this year, the British *Economist* magazine reported that, according to its analysis, fully one quarter of the world's young people are neither employed nor studying. This one fact epitomizes the reality that the capitalist system has no future to offer young people besides mass poverty and social misery.

There are 26 million young people in the developed world who are classified as “NEETS”: not in employment, education or training, according to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data cited by the Economist, together with 260 million young people in the developing world.

The magazine concludes that “almost 290m are neither working nor studying: almost a quarter of the planet's youth,” and as “large as the population of America.”

The most notable expansion of this group has taken place in the developed countries where, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the percent of young people classified as “NEETS” has increased by 2.1 percentage points since 2008, hitting 15.8 percent. As the ILO

concluded, “this means one in six young people [in developed countries] were without a job and not in education or training.”

The ILO added that the countries most affected by the 2008 crash and subsequent European debt crisis had some of the largest increases in this category. “In Estonia, Iceland, Ireland and Spain, the NEET rate increased by more than 5 percentage points between 2008 and 2010,” wrote the organization.

A vast number young people classified as “employed,” however, are working either in temporary or informal jobs. Last year, the International Labor Organization reported the growth of temporary employment for young people “has nearly doubled since the onset of the economic crisis.” The ILO noted part-time employment for young people in the developed world increased from around 20 percent in 2000 to nearly a third in 2011.

The growth in part-time work is only accelerating. According to one survey, the United States has actually replaced over 150,000 full-time jobs with part-time ones in the past three months. Between April and July, the number of people who are employed grew by 526,000, while the number employed part-time grew by 684,000, according to the Labor Department’s household survey.

Part-time work has made up 77 percent of the job growth so far this year and the number of part-time workers in America has reached a record 8.2 million. The new normal that has emerged under Obama’s so-called economic recovery are low-paying jobs with retailers, restaurants, temporary staffing firms and home health care—which made up nearly half the new jobs in 2013.

According to the ILO, in developing countries, which are home to more than 90 percent of the global youth, more than half of the young population is employed in the informal economy. The report notes this category of “vulnerable” young workers, who are either self-employed or working for their families, “accounts for 56.2 per cent of the employed in developing regions in 2011.”

In Greece, youth unemployment hit the staggering level of 64.9 percent last month, up from 54.1 percent in March 2012. For the EU as a whole, youth unemployment rose to 23.2 percent. According to the ILO, youth unemployment soared by 25 percent in the developed world between 2008 and 2012.

The dismal prospects confronting young people are the greatest expression of the failure of the capitalist system, which, confronting a systematic and interminable crisis, can only survive by throwing an ever-greater number of workers into poverty and destitution.

In fact, the vast impoverishment of young workers is a deliberate strategy of the ruling class, which is seeking to exploit the mass joblessness and desperation of the younger generation to put pressure on older workers to accept speedups, concessions, and wage cuts.

The goal of these policies is a vast historical retrogression in the conditions of life for working people and essentially turning the clock back to the 19th century. The immiseration of the working class, as Marx correctly insisted, is the general tendency of capitalism. Only the mass political and revolutionary struggles of the 20th century—chiefly the Russian Revolution in October 1917—forced the ruling classes of Europe and the United States to extend limited concessions to the working class, such as the eight-hour day, living wages, and retirement benefits.

The historic rollback in the conditions of the majority of the population has been made possible by the decades-long suppression of the class struggle by the trade unions and the social-democratic, Stalinist and pseudo-left political organizations, which fully accept the framework of the capitalist system and consequently the impoverishment of the working class.

The miserable social situation confronting young people—along with the danger of war and dictatorship—is an expression of the failure of all political programs based on nationalism and the conception that the capitalist system can be reformed to meet the needs of the vast majority of society. Without socialist politics and a revolutionary party to fight for it, as Leon Trotsky said, the working class is merely “raw material for exploitation.”

The failure of this system to provide a future to young people has already helped fuel mass social upheavals from Tunisia and Egypt to Greece and Spain. But the essential question facing youth and the working class as a whole is resolving the crisis of political leadership. To secure their future, young people must take up the fight to build a mass revolutionary party of the international working class to reorganize society on the basis of human needs, not private profit.