

Belgium: "Youth for Jobs" Campaign

Throughout Europe - as in the rest of the world - young workers have been particularly hard hit by unemployment. The present capitalist crisis means that millions of young people have never worked and have given up hope of ever getting a job. In Belgium, the unemployed youth have organised in a broad united front campaign called: "Youth for Jobs". The demands put forward by the campaign include: a 32 hour working week without loss of pay in order to create new jobs; an end to second-class, low-paying casual jobs; an end to the daily check on unemployed people and the delay in obtaining unemployment benefits; and other demands on training.

Early organising efforts in 1982 culminated in a demonstration in Brussels of 30,000 young people against unemployment. The demonstration was attacked by the police. Thereafter "Youth for Jobs" was subject to a sustained campaign of vilification by the bourgeois media, and activists and meetings were regularly harrassed by police. As a result a second demonstration was attended by only 15,000. But this does not reflect fully the achievements of "Youth for Jobs" - which sent shockwaves through the political establishment.

The Belgian ruling class was terrified by the success of the 1982 demonstration and its rejection of government austerity measures designed to solve the economic crisis at the expense of workers. "Youth for Jobs" put forward clearly anti-capitalist demands which were accepted by the largest organisation of young workers - Christian Worker Youth (JOC) - which comprises thousands of young militants. This radicalisation threatens the working class base of the main bourgeois party in Belgium - the Christian Democratic Party (CVP/PSC). JOC is affiliated to the Christian Workers Movement which in turn is linked to the Christian Democrats. The "Youth for Jobs" campaign also challenges the conservative leadership of the two big unions (the one led by Social Democrats, the other by Christian Democrats). The campaign has secured support from large numbers of young workers within the old unions. As such the "Youth for Jobs" campaign provides an alternative, at a mass level to policies of class collaboration. It holds out the hope for a joint mobilisation of workers and the unemployed against austerity, unemployment and the capitalist crisis.