

Young people are being short-changed by political elites and the economic system. It is no wonder they are so angry

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Youth unemployment has skyrocketed and government schemes to get young people into work are literally not paying off. [Bart Cammaerts](#) argues that forcing young people to work for free unveils a cynical contradiction in the government's appeal to young people to invest in their futures.



It makes one rather cynical to simultaneously read that youth unemployment has risen to over 1 million, and that young people who express a faint interest in an unpaid internship lose their benefits if it turns out that working for free is just not feasible for them. Forcing young people to work for free amounts to nothing less than a postmodern form of exploitation reminiscent of slavery. Internships and work placements have always been [controversial and prone to exploitation](#), which is why I believe workers should be remunerated at all times. Placements should also be coupled with some form of training to compensate for paying workers less than regular employees, and schemes should be linked to genuine opportunities and open positions for paid work afterwards.

The schemes that the government is putting forward, which offer unpaid placements without any prospects for a job afterwards, benefit the companies that receive free labour but not necessarily the unemployed. Why not? The main obstacle here is one of affordability. Who is able to work for free? The precarious situation many unemployed, and certainly the young unemployed, find themselves in makes them very vulnerable to labour. A single mother, for example, needs child care sorted out before being able to work. Someone dependent on their benefits to survive cannot afford the travel costs associated with going to work. In this country employers are not legally obliged to contribute to the costs employees incur to get to work and back home. As such, in a city like London, this means that some spend over half of their weekly allowance (£53) on transport costs in order to have the 'privilege' to work for free.

Unsurprisingly, it appears that large retail chains and supermarkets are participating in these forced labour schemes, exposing another sinister contradiction. The government is telling young people that if they want a better future they have to be ready to invest in it. (i.e. tripling tuition fee); yet on the other hand the opportunities the Government creates for these same young people are not in places relevant to their degrees, but in supermarkets and retail stores, filling shelves. It is hard to see how this could help a graduate find a paid job compatible to her level of education, so she will be able to pay back the debt the government bestowed upon her to pay for her education.

Young people, many of whom are desperate to work, are being short-changed by political elites and the economic system in which we live. While the public sector contracts and the private sector refuses to grow, companies are able to cherry pick whenever they do advertise a vacancy. At the same time, not only will the young generation be required to work longer and receive lower pensions at the end of their career (if they finally do find employment), they will also end up paying fully for their own education. It could be argued that the return on investment for young people is negative; they put more in and receive much less in return. No wonder there is so much anger and distrust of representative politics amongst younger (and increasingly also older) generations.