

US Attack on its Youth

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The U.S. government and state governments are engaged in a broad attack on the political rights, public health, as well as the sexual and reproductive rights of the young. Federal economic programs that provide financial assistance for housing, food, and education for young people from poor families are also threatened with budget cuts.

President-elect Donald Trump's pick for Secretary of Health, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., has asked the food and drug administration to revoke the approval of the polio vaccine that has protected millions from paralysis or death. RFK, who has said that "no vaccines are safe and effective," will encourage state governments to end vaccination requirements for public school children, which could unleash epidemics of measles, whooping cough, and meningitis. He also opposes putting fluoride in public water systems, a practice that has protected children's teeth. Scientists and physicians have said that RFK's policies put children's very lives in danger.

At the same time, sexual and reproductive rights of girls and women are also under attack from Republicans and Evangelical Christians. In 2022 the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Roe v. Wade decision which had given federal protection to women seeking abortion. Since then, abortion has been banned in 13 states and made more difficult in others. Ten states have limited access to abortion pills. And in June several Republicans voted against a federal law that would have protected access to contraception.

Sex education in schools is also being threatened. Only the three West Coast states provide comprehensive sex education, that is, age-appropriate education in kindergarten through high school classes. Such education helps prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Seventeen Republican rules states in the Midwest and the South only provide "abstinence only" sex education. Across the country, politicians have introduced some 137 bills to stop or restrict sex education. Any discussion of gender or sexual orientation in schools is banned in three states and restricted in five.

Turning to higher education, the cost makes it prohibitive for many. Today the tuition at a public institution is \$10,940 plus living expenses. At private institutions the average cost is more than \$60,000 for tuition, room and board. These costs make college difficult if not impossible for many, which may be why attendance has fallen by 5% since the COVID pandemic of 2020-22.

Black students face greater obstacles than in the recent past. The Supreme Court ruled in 2023 that a college applicant's race could not be taken into account as it had been before because of affirmative action programs. Even before the Court's decision, between 2010 and 2020 undergraduate Black student enrollment in colleges declined by 25%, from 2.67 million to 1.99 million. Today 40% of white children will graduate from college, but only 19% of Black children will. And the gap is widening because of poorer schools, discrimination, and cost. The result will be lower incomes for Black working people. The recent court decision will make it even harder for Black people to get college educations, and Black enrollment is falling.

Young people's social and political rights are also threatened. Historically, colleges were bastions of

free speech and scenes of progressive social protest. But during campus protests against Israel's genocidal war on Palestine this past year, university administrators had guards or police shut down protests and take down campus encampments, during which some students were arrested. Palestinian speakers were canceled and Palestinian organizations harassed. New rules often now limit protests and inhibit free speech.

Young people are being attacked at every level, and when people are attacked, one can expect they will fight back. We socialists will be with them.

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P.S.

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