

Out in the Cold

Zhang Zhiping

China is set to experience severe employment difficulties in 2009 against the global economic crisis. The huge number of migrant workers will become the first victims of this crisis. Since October 2008, a number of export-oriented small and medium-sized businesses have closed down or cut production, forcing migrant workers to return home from coastal areas. By the end of 2008, one of the country's top migrant worker source areas, southwest Sichuan Province, had seen 780,000 migrant workers make their way back home.

Fresh college graduates also face a cold winter. Ten years ago, China's colleges began to massively enlarge their enrollment, which has led to sharp increases in graduates in recent years. According to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, in 2009, 6.1 million new graduates need jobs. When added to those unable to find employment in past years, the number of college-educated first-time job seekers is likely to top 7 million. A large proportion of these people are forced to choose further education because of the current severe employment situation. As a result, the number of candidates taking the 2009 national postgraduate entrance exam reached 1.25 million, an increase of 50,000 year on year.

The employment crisis has forced job seekers to shed their traditional concepts of employment. Many college graduates are looking for job opportunities in small and medium-sized cities or trying to start up their own businesses. At the same time, they begin to develop a more rational understanding of their own identity and capability and lower expectations about their first job.

The tough job market has attracted attention from various quarters. Premier Wen Jiabao presided over the executive meeting of the State Council on January 7, focusing on the employment problem. Seven measures emerged from the meeting. A new scheme to help college graduates become employed is expected to be launched in February. The new scheme will shatter the conventional employment model, under which college students wait for job opportunities to come to them. Instead it will round up college students for vocational training through cooperation between colleges and designated institutions. After they have undergone this process, the students will be much better prepared for career challenges. This is believed to relieve the employment pressure on graduates.

The Chinese Government regards stable and rapid economic growth and job creation as two priorities of its anti-crisis efforts. In order to maintain economic growth, in November 2008 the Central-Government launched a 4-trillion-yuan (\$586 billion) economic stimulus package, which highlights basic infrastructure and public projects. This is expected to effectively expand domestic demand and create more job opportunities. With the efforts being made to employ young people, there is good reason to remain optimistic. □□□

[Source : Beijing Review, Jan 22, 2009]