

**A CHARTER
FOR YOUNG
WORKERS
AND
STUDENTS**

A LEFT HORIZONS BOOKLET

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INTRODUCTION

Young people across the globe have the most to lose.

The overwhelming majority of the global population, over 8 bn, are poor and have little in the way of wealth or property. The so-called 'market' system syphons off an ever-greater share of wealth and income from the majority, and into the hands of a handful of the super-wealthy.

A dozen or so mega-billionaires have the same total wealth as all of the rest of the world put together and it is a proportion that is growing year on year. For the mass of people, capitalism is putting ever more strain on their livelihoods.

It is above all young people who suffer from an economic system based on greed and profit. The median age of the world's population is around 30 years of age and around 2.7bn are under 20 years of age. Many countries, including the poorest, have a big majority of young people. In Africa, 40% of the population are under 15 years of age; in Latin America, it is nearly a quarter.

Young people as a whole have more to lose than any other section of the Earth's population. It is *their* future that is threatened by the possibility of wars and social upheavals and it is *their* future that is blighted by the certainty of damaging climate change.

A lifestyle more insecure and uncertain than ever before

The environmental damage that has already been done – and is *still* being done – will have such profound economic and political consequences that it puts into question the continued existence of human civilisation in the longer term.

Today's young people are not just witnessing the impact of capitalism on their own generation, but also on their future. They are being thrust into unprecedented levels of inequality, deteriorating living standards, environmental degradation, and the looming threat of war. Young people are seeing their entire generation inheriting a planet in crisis.

Even in countries, like the UK, where people are *relatively* better off, the living standards of young people are threatened. For many young people, their lives are consumed by meaningless, insecure and precarious work, so low-paid that it is barely enough to live on. The protective measures that once improved working conditions, fought for and won in the past by strong trade unions, have been steadily eroded over the years.

Despite these challenges, the younger generation also shows remarkable resilience. Many are juggling multiple jobs, often on zero-hours, while being faced with substandard housing on unaffordable rents and in a housing market spiralling out of control. The dream of 'security' through home ownership has become a distant mirage for many.

Schools, colleges and universities are all in the grip of a severe underfunding crisis, where often educational needs have low priority alongside corporate interests. The National Health Service, once a cornerstone of British society, has visibly deteriorated, with long waiting times for appointments and treatments, and an almost complete absence of mental health services and dentistry.

The under-40s are the first generation to see a significant decline in their standard of living and overall quality of life since the end of the Second World War. This decline is not a result of frivolous spending, as some politicians have suggested, on "*avocado toast, vapes, or takeaway coffees*". Most young people are running hard to stand still, and they see a future without any security or prosperity.

Staggering levels of low pay and inequality are not 'accidental' features of social development, but are a result the greed of the billionaire bosses. Young working-class people are forced to perform on a seemingly endless hamster-wheel of work, while they are unable to afford secure or affordable housing, or funds for decent food, clothes and leisure.

Too many politicians in the pockets of the rich and big business

Rather than offer real solutions to these problems, too many politicians – bought and paid for by the rich and big business – try to divert attention from the real causes of these crises, to various scapegoats, particularly asylum seekers, who are demonised on both mainstream and social media. Meanwhile, the rich and super-rich laugh all the way to the banks, which they own!

For the first time in human history, wildfires, floods, man-made disasters, pandemics, wars and even genocide can be seen across the entire globe *in real-time* on social media. Amid this growing social chaos, the ruling class, look on from the decks of their mega-yachts, offering empty gestures and fake 'green initiatives'. They lecture workers and young people about their 'unsustainable' levels of consumption, while they book their seats on the next flights out to colonise space.

Capitalism in the last few decades has lurched from crisis to crisis. Workers were barely able to recover from one crisis before the next one overtook them. The economic crash 2008 was one of the defining episodes for the younger generations, but Covid also exposed the huge inequalities in the system. The lowest paid workers in health and social care were 'clapped' for their sacrifices and ignored when it was over. While workers suffered from the huge hikes in prices after the pandemic, Covid saw the rich get richer.

Many young people are starting to fight for a better future

Capitalism — a system based on profit and not need — is only 'broken' as far as workers and young people are concerned. For a tiny wealthy minority, it is working very nicely, thank you. The capitalist economic system is based on exploitation and oppression. It squeezes more and more from workers to boost its profit, ripping off the *many* for the benefit of the *few*.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to solve your problems by scrimping and scraping or redesigning your household budget. It's time to get together, organise, and fight back. It is time to turn apathy and anger into political activity to fundamentally change the system and live in hope.

Capitalism has proved repeatedly that it cannot provide the solutions to the needs of most of the population or even guarantee the existence of life on earth, but it will not have the decency to die off on its own accord – the working class will need to end it.

For young people today, we are in the era of the 'gig economy', with its zero-hours contracts, low pay and 'side hustles', all adding up to an intensified exploitation of young workers and an absence of opportunity.

Young people in employment are probably more dispersed and disconnected from one another in smaller, isolated workplaces, than they might have been in the past. It might be harder, therefore, to get together to organise and to fight for better conditions, but many young people are doing just that.

By getting active in trade unions, young workers can link arms in solidarity with all the oppressed sections of society to fight against an oppressive and dying system. Young people need to prepare themselves, to read, study and learn politics, to get the necessary skills, to fight for a better tomorrow.

Organise for your future!

More and more young people worldwide are getting involved in inspiring campaigns, at work, in trade unions or in different community campaigns. They are increasingly demanding more than just a few crumbs from the table. All people, especially young workers, are demanding a better life.

It is a myth that young people are not interested in politics. They are often in the forefront of campaigns for democracy and rights. They have been the major part of the many huge demonstrations against the genocidal bombing of Gaza and for Palestinian rights. They have organised university encampments on the issue. It is only the 'traditional' politics and politicians that put young people off.

This booklet is offered as a guide and an aid to the development of a socialist political youth movement. It does not pretend to have all the answers, or deal with all the issues, but it offers ideas, information and arguments. We hope these will stimulate young readers into becoming engaged in political activities in a serious way and for the long term.

It is intended, not only as an analysis of the problems that young people make, but it also includes what we believe are reasonable demands and expectations – things we *ought* to expect in a modern and wealthy advanced economy. We believe it points the way for a better socialist future.

The time to fight for socialism is now. Organise and fight for it! – Solidarity!

Left Horizons is a socialist website, produced by activists within the working-class movement. You can find it on www.left-horizons.com/ You can also send comments on this booklet to editor@left-horizons.co.uk and we can pass them on to the authors.

WORK AND THE ECONOMY

Young workers face unemployment rates nearly three times higher than other age groups. Around a sixth of young people aged between 16 and 24 are not employed or in full-time education. Young people are far more likely to be employed on zero-hour contracts or in low-paid work without employment rights.

Shockingly, three-quarters of young people who *are* in work miss out on essential employment rights, including protection from unfair dismissal, statutory sick pay, maternity pay and fair holiday pay.

The impact of privatisation has been extremely damaging, particularly to young people, with key utilities such as water, public transport, and electricity being prime examples of this. The quality of the services provided has got steadily worse, while costs have soared.

Thames Water, for example, one of many key utilities, has been exploited for financial gain by its bosses and shareholders. It has accumulated over £16 bn in debt since its privatisation, while it has invested little in new infrastructure and poured out massive sums in dividends.

While its captive customers have paid massively increased bills, company executives have got huge bonus payments. Instead of being managed as a service for the benefit of the public, Thames Water has been used only to benefit bosses and make quick profits for private owners.

Even when the last government didn't fully implement privatisation of a service – like the NHS and local government services – they still promoted 'outsourcing' so the services effectively operate as if they are privatised, often with much poorer pay and conditions for the workers. Every single

government department functions as a means of handing out lucrative contracts, generating tidy profits for private companies and third-rate products or services for local and national government.

Privatisation means public services are *plundered* for profit

Nowhere is this ripping off of the public sector clearer than with so-called Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs). PFIs were launched to allow the public sector to build schools and hospitals, but only if they were financed by from banks and private companies, who were then paid back – at very high interest rates – over 25 or 30 years, and then the buildings remained the property of the banks, etc.

The net result is that the cost of building a school, or a hospital is paid for six, ten, or fifteen times over. Billions of pounds are still flooding out today from the budgets of local authorities and the NHS for buildings opened fifteen years ago.

It is privatisation of services and *plundering* by business that have contributed massively to the financial crises of local government and the NHS and it is part of the reason why so many workers in these services are so poorly paid. The financial crisis in these services also means a tight limit on the career opportunities for young people, in nursing, healthcare or local government.

The drive for profit above all else also means that apprenticeships in manufacturing, services and other sectors have all but disappeared. Many young people would jump at the opportunity to learn a profession or trade in a stable work environment and with an industry or sector that had a future.

Big employers are obliged to pay an apprenticeship levy to the government to promote training. Businesses are supposed to

claw back payments to pay for apprenticeships, but in practice, many employers are misusing the scheme, paying instead for training and diplomas in business and management. Anything but training young workers!

At the recent Labour conference, Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, announced what he called Foundation Apprenticeships. But however these pan out – and the details are yet to be announced – they must mean real career training opportunities for young people and not just cheap labour. Starmer offered a so-called ‘Youth Guarantee’ to eliminate youth unemployment, but what is really needed is a drive to eliminate the low-paid, dead-end jobs in which so many young workers feel stuck.

It should be a right for young people, not only to go to universities if they wish, but to be offered good, decently-paid and worthwhile apprenticeships in different sectors of the economy.

Young people should demand:

** The re-nationalisation of key utilities like water, electricity, and gas along with the post office and the rail industry*

** That Wi-Fi should be a public service available to all*

** An end to out-sourcing of services in local authorities and national government departments.*

** The abolition of zero-hour contracts and trade union level protections for all young people*

** A national minimum wage of £15 an hour for all adults over 18, and while it is to be expected that trainees will not be paid the same rate as qualified staff, the pro-rata wage of trainees must be enough to live on.*

** That employers pay for a national plan for modern apprenticeships*

** Comprehensive training and clear career progression for all new employees*

CLIMATE CHANGE

Young people will be more directly impacted than any of the older generations by climate change, as they face the increasing effects of the warming of the planet. Despite all warnings from scientists and the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) about the need for rapid and far-reaching transitions to limit global warming global emissions have continued to rise.

We are already exceeding the limit that was set of a rise of 1.5°C (above pre-industrial levels). The last decade has been the warmest on record and each year seems to set new records for average global temperatures. There will be catastrophic consequences for the melting of the planet's ice sheets, causing sea level rises. Global warming will cause an greater frequency of 'extreme' weather events. Climate change is happening *now*.

It is a complex and chaotic process, with scientists warning of potentially devastating "positive feedback" mechanisms, like

the release of methane – a powerful greenhouse gas – from permafrost and the sea beds, as they warm up.

Despite government pledges to move towards ‘zero carbon’, the policies put in place are nothing like enough, compared to what is needed. There are still political parties and politicians who simply deny climate change. Like the tobacco companies who bribed scientists into denying the link between smoking and cancer, fossil fuel companies continue to fund climate change denial.

Young people already recognise the urgency of the situation and the need for governments to take immediate action. Even if we stopped all greenhouse gas emissions tomorrow, the impacts of climate change are already deeply embedded in natural processes. Our challenge is not only to transition to zero emissions but also to prepare for the future and to mitigate the worst effects of climate change.

What we cannot do is allow those who have trashed the planet – the big fossil fuel producers – to get away with managing a shift to ‘zero carbon’ because it is something they will never do efficiently or soon enough. Profit and prestige are king and if these determine outcomes, there will be no shift away from fossil fuels.

The huge companies that dominate the energy sector cannot be left in the hands of private profiteers. The entire energy sector should be democratically managed and publicly owned so that there can be planned investment, retraining, redeployment of workers and a planned transition to renewable energy.

Even where there already are state-owned oil companies, like in the Middle East and Russia, the oil production and income are only used to benefit the prestige and wealth of a narrow

layer at the top of the population. They, too, should be forced to transition to renewables by the democratic management of the energy businesses by their own working class.

On a global scale, over \$3 trillion is spent every year on weaponry and instruments of mass destruction. If even a tenth of this were diverted to investment in renewable energy, the problem of carbon emissions would be solvable in a measurable period of time – but such a policy requires the socialist transformation of society, so the mass of the population can exert their political control over the 1% who are currently in charge.

A socialist approach to climate policy offers the only practical solution by calling for public ownership of fossil fuel companies and redirecting resources from military spending towards green initiatives. We can create a more sustainable and equitable world by integrating environmental concerns with campaigns for fundamental human rights. It's time to empower individuals to be part of the solution and fight for a future where our planet and its people are prioritised over profit and greed.

Young people should demand:

** An urgent end to the use of fossil fuels, in a definite and measurable time period.*

** The democratic nationalisation of the entire energy industry and the promotion of a Green Industrial Revolution*

** Government investment and a transition to solar, wind, tidal and other renewable energy sources*

** A focus on retraining and redeployment, without loss of pay, for all those workers currently working in the fossil fuel*

industries, but especially on training younger workers in newer industries. Workers in current industries must be won to a plan for a just transition.

** Public ownership of land so that land use can be planned for the benefit of all, in terms of food production and environmental protection.*

** Government investment in dams and barriers to mitigate and protect from climate catastrophes, like floods and sea inundation, where appropriate.*

** Switch military spending to green investment.*

** A publicly-owned, integrated public transport system, including bus, rail and air*

HEALTHCARE

The NHS has, for years, been starved of the resources it needs to pay its staff a decent rate of pay and to provide the services it ought to provide. It is no accident that there are now millions of people waiting on some list or other for an operation or a medical procedure.

It has been the *deliberate policy* of successive Tory governments to run the NHS into the ground, so that the private sector can attract profitable custom from those who are so desperate that they can no longer wait for treatment. As the

NHS *seizes up*, the private sector – which doesn't train a single nurse, doctor or technician – *cleans up*.

The collapse of general NHS services is particularly noticeable in mental health, which is a vital issue for young people, many of whom feel themselves trapped in dead-end jobs or a failing education system. They see themselves as 'failures' because they cannot 'live up to' the charmed lives portrayed on the internet and social media by celebrities and so-called 'influencers'. Among young men, especially, rates of mental illness and suicides are higher than in any other age bracket.

Although it might be the case that society has made progress by more openly discussing mental health and well-being issues, the decay of the NHS under the impact of capitalism has meant the severe rationing of mental health treatment. There is such a minimal service for young people in regard to mental health that the only thing they might be offered is antidepressant medication.

It is a system that *depoliticises* mental health, disregarding factors like the exploitation of young people at work, the failures of the housing system and poverty, which contribute to all the problems. Among those 18-24-year-olds who suffer from mental health issues, one in five report severe distress specifically due to housing concerns. The mainstream media consciously avoids the real causes of mental health issues, and, instead, reduces them to the actions of individuals or to purely biological factors.

A few employers show nominal support for mental health 'awareness' but there is a generalised failure by employers to provide *material solutions*, such as a decent living wage. Politicians make promises, but there are no serious efforts to provide affordable homes to young people. There are promises galore to "save the NHS" but mostly without addressing privatisation and its terrible impact on services.

The damage to the NHS extends into all aspects of its supposed remit: from growing waiting lists for operations, to high mortality rates for Black mothers in maternal health, to long waiting lists for transgender and gender dysphoric people (especially young people), to a virtual absence of dentistry in some areas and to the decimation of mental health services.

This cannot be allowed to continue. Young people should demand – *as a right* – access to a modern, publicly funded and nationally available health service, free at the point of use, across all areas of health, and one that values all staff members equally.

Young people should demand:

** An end to out-sourcing of services in the NHS and the cancellation of all PFI contracts still in effect, without compensation.*

** A fully publicly-owned NHS, incorporating private hospitals and clinics, including adequate dental services and mental health care, all free at the point of use, including free prescriptions*

** The repeal of the Health and Social Care Act (2012)*

** A national, publicly-owned care service for the elderly and adults in social care, integrated with the NHS and local authorities*

HOUSING

Young people face an uphill battle in housing. They face exorbitant rents, neglectful landlords, and the fading dream of home-ownership. Whether buying or renting, the picture is bleak. It blights the lives of young couples wishing to set up home together.

For the parents and grandparents of today's young people, it seemed that hard work at least provided some gateway to setting up a home and starting a family. That is no longer the case. While the older generations are *mostly*, and *comparatively*, more secure, most young people face insecurity in their future housing needs.

According to the Financial Times, one in five young people live alone or with peers. Nearly half of 18-34-year-olds still live with their parents *because they can afford to do little else* – and this is a rising trend, from 30% in the early 2000s to over 40% today.

Young couples are faced with skyrocketing house prices, which are now at their highest, as a proportion of wages, since 1876. While homeownership required twice the average salary in the 1920s, it now demands ten times that! Saving for a deposit takes 13 years in the UK, and in London – 30 years!

Young people are told over and over that they need to 'own' their home to get financial security, but buying a house or a flat is an ambition fast disappearing into the distance. In 2010, only a tenth of young people needed financial assistance to put down a deposit on buying a home, but by 2020, the figure had risen to nearly a third. Homeownership is increasingly restricted to the sons and daughters of the most affluent, or a small minority of young couples who happen to have very highly paid jobs.

'Generation Rent'

The housing crisis is at least as great for those who pay rent, which is rising nationally at an unprecedented rate. Many young couples are paying more than half of their total take-home pay just to keep a roof over their heads.

Such huge financial strains mean that young couples often cannot afford it, and so defer the decision to have families. King's College research shows that a 10% house price increase boosts births by 2.8% among *homeowners*, because they see the value of their property enhanced, but it decreases births by 4.9% among *renters*.

So many young people are forced to pay exorbitant rents, because they cannot afford the higher costs of buying, that they're being called 'Generation Rent'. Around six and a half million live in private rentals in the UK, and these are overwhelming young people and young couples. They are low-income families, and often among minority communities.

High rents have been driven by the lack of any rent controls and a huge shortage of social housing – particularly council housing – because of Thatcher's 'right-to-buy' scheme, which sold off council houses at knock-down prices, and which was disgracefully allowed to continue under the post-1997 Labour governments.

In London, for example, to where many young people are pushed to move because there are fewer jobs elsewhere, rents average £2,121 a month, which is more than the take-home pay of most single workers. This same trend extends to university towns, where the demand for student accommodation inflates costs. Landlords who own multiple properties often cite 'inflation' and 'mortgage' costs to justify high rents, but it is, in reality, *greed and the profit motive* that dominate the private rented sector.

It is not just that rents are astronomically high. It is also that so many privately-rented flats and houses are *substandard*. In fact, one in six young adults lives in some form of substandard housing, either damp, or in a state of disrepair. Nearly a quarter of private rental accommodation fails to meet basic decent living standards, increasing stress and doubling health risks.

Worst of all, we have a dramatic increase in the number of homeless people for whom the system cannot provide even the basic minimum accommodation and have to sleep in the streets. Homelessness is 61% higher than it was ten years ago and even in the last three months of last year it jumped 16%.

This is a terrible a scar on the conscience of any society that tolerates it. Thousands more families are reduced to “temporary accommodation” in hotel rooms or in substandard, overcrowded conditions, far away from the communities they know, while they wait longer and longer to be rehoused in the shrinking stock of social housing.

Landlords intimidate tenants into silence

Landlords have the power to intimidate many young people into *not* complaining about the standards of their properties or their high rents, by using the threat of a so-called ‘no fault’ eviction. In this way, many young couples feel themselves trapped and powerless against a faceless and unscrupulous system that seems to be designed only to milk them dry.

It cannot be right, in a modern industrial economy, where office blocks and commercial properties can be built at the drop of a hat, that young people’s life choices are blocked in this way.

Young people must fight for the right to decent, secure, and affordable housing. But we must also recognise that the housing crisis is not an ‘accidental’ thing, something unpredictable, like the weather.

The fundamental problem lies in the *deliberate failure* of developers, landowners and building companies to build enough decent homes. A handful of big building companies completely dominate the so-called 'market', which is driven entirely by profit.

House-building should not depend on a failing 'market'

Builders, developers and those who 'hoard' land will deliberately and *as a matter of policy* maintain the housing shortage because that is the best guarantee of higher prices and higher profits. Higher prices then also translate into higher rents.

The solution to this problem is a *political* one – giving local authorities powers to *municipalise* the properties of large landlords, to bring the properties up to a good standard, with adequate insulation and facilities, as part of the *council house* stock. All properties should be subject to rent controls linked to the minimum wage, so no families pay more than a reasonable share of income in rent. Properties should also be subject to strict structural and insulation standards.

But what is also required is a national, publicly owned building corporation, providing finance and support to local authorities to build large numbers of good quality social houses. Land for housing, particularly so-called 'brown-site' land in urban areas should be taken out of the hands of private developers who are sitting on it, waiting for its value to rise. Their needs are less important than the needs of homeless young couples.

A socialist government, taking over the big six building companies that dominate the 'market' and planning a national house-building programme, could build a million homes a year, properly insulated and ready for a carbon-free future.

Such a government could sponsor the creation of thousands of apprenticeships in the building sector – training needs the building companies ignore – to provide skilled work, good pay to workers and a solution to the housing shortage all in one.

Young people should demand:

- * Decent housing as a basic human right*
- * Rent controls on all privately-rented properties*
- * Security of tenure for council and private renters and an end to 'no fault' evictions.*
- * A transition to council housing by the municipalisation of all big landlords and of properties deliberately kept empty*
- * The enforcement of decent housing standards, with inspections and improvement orders*
- * A public corporation, composed of the nationalised big six building companies, and all housing development land*
- * Finance provided at low or nominal rates of interest for local authorities to build council homes.*
- * The abolition of 'right-to-buy'*
- * Serious investment in rehousing those who are "street-homeless", with properly-funded services catering to their sometimes complex needs.*

EDUCATION

Education is a fundamental right for all young people, yet inequality and gaps in learning are features of the current system. Successive Tory governments have failed in all sectors of the education system, from childcare through to higher education.

In 2024, the Fawcett Society highlighted that UK childcare for most young mothers is unaffordable and of low quality, forcing 85% of mothers to leave their jobs. Good quality care for pre-school children should lay the ground for future learning, but the lack of good childcare, or its unaffordability, significantly affects a child's education. In other words, where young families cannot afford good quality childcare – which is true in most cases – it impacts their children's learning into the foreseeable future.

Schools are also in crisis, with buildings crumbling, inadequate provision of the essentials of modern education, like books and IT equipment, and, above all, with a continuous growth in class sizes.

In 2023, an astonishing 276 UK schools closed due to unsafe concrete. This problem traces back to cuts made by the Tory Education Minister, Michael Gove. He stopped the '*Building Schools for the Future*' programme, through which the previous Labour government was spending billions of pounds on refurbishing and rebuilding schools, dead in its tracks.

Schools allowed to go to rack and ruin

The education cuts of the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition, organised by Gove, aimed, above all, to cut costs by cutting capital spending on buildings and current costs on books and equipment. By 2023, 24,000 school buildings had outlived their lifespan, and needed necessary upgrades that would cost £300,000 per primary school and £1.5mn per secondary school.

Successive Tory governments siphoned huge sums of public money into private profits, resulting in school pupils suffering in cold and unsafe environments. Added to this, the general squeeze on living standards and the huge increase in child poverty – to over four million – meant that it was schoolteachers and schools who had to step in to address poverty issues.

Academies open the door to privatisation

Although it ate into their shrinking budgets, many schools made heroic attempts to alleviate local poverty, with breakfast clubs and after-school care. Teachers have been obliged to cope with the fall-out from disrupted home lives, poor housing and poverty as school became the only relatively stable and reliable part of the lives of many students.

What has made the entire primary and secondary school system far worse has been the 'privatisation' of schools. Whereas in the past, elected local authorities had responsibility for education, the big majority of secondaries have now been turned into 'academies', opening the doors to privatised services.

School governing bodies used to be accountable to local communities, albeit inefficiently, through having councillors, parents and teachers on them. But arrangements for academies are far worse. In some cases, huge schools and huge areas of land – once belonging to the local community – have been turned over to self-selecting ‘boards’ of academies with no connection or accountability to the local community. Out of the reach of local authorities, some academies are now paying their headteachers – not the teachers, of course – telephone number salaries.

Politicians favouring academisation argued that Local Education Authorities were ‘too large’ but we now have academy trusts which are huge agglomerations, sometimes with of scores of schools, which are far bigger than local education authorities – and far less accountable to the local populations they are supposed to serve.

The neglect of the education system by successive governments and the shrinking budgets going to schools have meant that teachers and school staff have had a struggle to get the best from what meagre resources they have. For some parents and students, unfortunately, their ‘best’ hasn’t been enough, and many more students than before are voting with their feet.

Over-reliance on tables, targets and testing

Absenteeism has risen from 10%, pre-Covid, to 22% today, and this is often linked to poverty, neglect, and mental health issues. The whole system has an over-reliance on exams and results, to the extent that it undermines learning and well-being.

Teachers even joke that the old 'three Rs' (reading, writing and arithmetic) have been replaced by the 'three Ts' – tables, targets and testing. The focus of successive Education ministers, transmitted through Ofsted to schools and headteachers, has been on performance metrics and nothing else. The so-called 'drive' to raise standards (and it is always a 'drive') has resulted in demoralisation among both students and staff.

Not surprisingly, many experienced teachers just give up what used to be a cherished profession, and even a high proportion of newly qualified teachers follow them to the exit door. Their low pay – they have lost 15% in real spending terms – simply doesn't make up for the treadmill of tables, targets and testing.

The Tories, true to the snobbish attitudes of grammar-school and public-school educated toffs, have always emphasised 'academic' subjects and A-levels in particular. Meanwhile, as schools are 'driven' to get ever-better results from ever-shrinking resources, languages and technical and creative subjects have been drastically cut back.

University and college focus on 'business orientation'

The crisis in education goes right through to the top. Higher education costs have skyrocketed, with universities and colleges becoming more 'business-oriented' and unaffordable. The only way working class students can go to university is to accept that they will be saddled with tens of thousands of pounds in debts for accommodation, fees and living expenses – a debt they will spend most of their lives paying off.

According to the Higher Education Policy Institute, students face a "*cost of learning crisis*" as the maximum loan entitlement falls short by £8,400 per year to meet the minimum income

standard required for university studies. Successive hikes in tuition fees have only deepened student debt on every occasion.

Not that loans can fill all the gaps. The maximum loan currently covers only 55% of the minimum income standard outside of London and without parental support, students need to work at least 19 hours a week on minimum wage just to get by. It is becoming nearly impossible for some students to fill the gap in funding without it compromising their studies.

Industries should provide in-work training to degree level

Higher education should be a right, *accessible and free*, for all young people. But it is also important that those young people leaving school should have a far wider choice of career paths. If the big companies that dominate the economy were interested in more than simply profits and shareholder dividends, they would provide – as similar companies do elsewhere in Europe – a far wider choice of training and education post-18.

Modern, degree-style apprenticeships in IT, engineering, manufacturing and in other sectors should be made far more readily available, so school-leavers have the choice of a *paid* training programme, and one that led them onto a career path in a viable industry. Just as the Tories' snobbery over the 'superiority' of A-levels leads them to neglect technical subjects in schools, the same haughty and old-fashioned attitude puts 'academic' degrees on a pedestal, while industry and work-based training is considered 'second class'.

The fight for a workable and viable education system, therefore, must be at all levels – from pre-school child-care to higher education. We should fight for a root and branch reform

of education, to ensure that it serves all young people equitably.

Young people should demand:

- * Free and accessible childcare centres run by local authorities.*
- * The abolition of Ofsted and its replacement by local authority regulators and inspectors who value student learning and well-being over targets and testing*
- * The provision of healthy, free school meals for all school students*
- * The reform of the qualifications system to incorporate a wider range of diplomas and certificates in technical and practical subjects.*
- * The end of an over-reliance on tests and exams. Develop and promote continuous assessment of learning.*
- * An end to the academy system and academy trusts – all primary and secondary schools should be brought back under the control of Local Education Authorities.*
- * That all class sizes are limited to a maximum of 15*
- * That secondary schools include life skills in the curriculum, including learning about trade unions, job contracts, taxes, housing and politics*
- * The abolition of private schools and the incorporation of their resources into local authority education systems.*

** That higher education be made far wider, to incorporate work and industry-based courses*

** The abolition of tuition fees, the cancellation of student debts and the provision of maintenance grants for students.*

** Decent pay and conditions of employment for workers, teachers and lecturers at all levels of education.*

** That universities are properly financed from national government and obliged to focus on education and not business interests*

DEMOCRACY AND RIGHTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Politicians are fond of boasting that the United Kingdom is one of the oldest democracies in the world, and is governed by the 'mother of parliaments'. But it should never be forgotten that the rights we have today – from the right to vote, to speak our mind, to demonstrate, and for unions to organise and strike if necessary – were all won through past *struggle*. Not a single one of those rights were given for nothing.

Nor should we forget that there is a drive to limit those rights – such as the right to demonstrate. Even the right to vote is under attack, by using a voter ID system deliberately aimed against young voters. While pensioners can use bus passes as

photo ID, students with valid university or college photo ID are barred from using them to qualify for voting.

The UK has a constitutional monarchy, in which the sovereign holds official power over parliament and can modify and overturn laws brought in by the government – often away from the prying eyes of the public. While defenders of the monarchy claim that the King would not ‘abuse’ his power, the fact remains that the judiciary, the civil service, the police and the military all *officially* owe their allegiance to the Crown, and not to parliament.

The monarchy is not there for the benefit of tourists, but because it is a *political device*, a ‘reserve’ weapon for the establishment, available to be wheeled out in the event of any serious threat to its vital interests.

A 2023 YouGov poll found that 41% of young people aged 18-24 would prefer an elected head of state as against than 31% who support the monarchy. This is a remarkable majority, considering the fawning and toadying of most of the media and it shows the gut feeling of many young people who would prefer a more democratic system without ‘kings or queens’.

Sitting alongside the monarchy, as a check on the powers of the elected House of Commons, there is also the House of Lords, an undemocratic institution where its members have an average age of 70. It is not just a lucrative rest home for business tycoons, given peerages by their political friends, but it is a significant power. It also influences government policy according to the personal connections between politicians and vested business interests. This is unacceptable.

The right to free expression is already severely limited by having the mainstream media controlled by a handful of billionaires. Social media is also owned exclusively by

billionaires. The super-rich are a powerful class, and their resources have been used to suppress minorities and keep the opinions of youth quiet for many years.

Probably the greatest flaw in our so-called democracy is that the means of disseminating news and information is rigorously controlled by a tiny proportion of the population. Their broadcast, printed and on-line media play the dominant role in shaping attitudes in society.

Even though the circulation of newspapers has declined in recent years, due to the popularity of social media, they still maintain a strong presence by having moved online. *The Sun*, for example, is a rag, well known for campaigning against the interests of ordinary workers, chiefly by creating division over race, ethnicity and hostility to all minorities. It still has over 6 million print readers in the UK, but five times that number of hits on its website every month.

Many young people recognize the negative impact of content of *The Sun*, and a poll commissioned by *Stop Funding Hate* revealed that 50% of the population thought it has a "negative influence" on society. That is particularly true among young people. The racist, misogynistic, and bigoted news published by *The Sun* – and much the same goes for the *Daily Mail*, the *Express* and the *Star* – has no place in a *properly informed* democracy.

Legacy (mainstream) media has lost its former monopoly on fake and made-up news and nowadays it is social media that now plays a key role in spreading disinformation – including anti-working class, racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic 'news', and bigotry in general. It is one of the main reasons for the growth of the far right.

Private ownership and control of the mass media and social media cannot be reconciled with real democracy.

Young people should demand:

- * An end to voter ID regulations that are biased against students*
- * An end to the unelected House of Lords – there is no reason for second chamber*
- * An elected head of state, with all Crown land and properties becoming the property of the nation.*
- * The public ownership of the printed media and social media platforms with democratic control and regulation mechanisms, supported by IT specialists.*
- * Access to the press and social media for all political groups, youth groups, charities, and campaign organisations on the basis of their popular support.*
- * Access to the media by youth organisations, young people's campaigns and marginalised communities.*
- * Democratic control of the press and social media and its regulation to prevent the publication of misogynistic, racist, homophobic or other bigoted content. Access to press resources, based on popular support.*
- * That MPs be paid the wage of a skilled worker, and barred from any other paid employment*
- * That the recall of MPs should be made easier, to remove MPs not fulfilling the promises and commitments they gave before election*

The fight for the rights of marginalized groups, including women and the disabled, is crucial for all young people. Their fight for their rights is *our* fight. Young people above all, must be in the forefront of the fight against misogyny, violence against women and girls, and unfair treatment of vulnerable people in the workplace and in society.

Young people should stand up for equal pay for equal work and for a recognition – with compensation – for *caregiving* as a valuable element in any civilised society.

Much more than for their parents and grandparents, young people today tend to be more integrated with people of other races, ethnicities and traditions, and generally more accepting. The prejudices of the older generations may be gradually dying out among younger people, but racism is far from eliminated. Black and Asian people still face serious challenges for equal rights and treatment in job opportunities, in education and within institutions like the police.

In recent years, political parties like Reform UK and the Tories have deliberately tried to stir up racism to garner support, although they have had less effect on young people than on the older generations. However, it is important for young people to continue to fight against the dangers of racist, misogynistic and other reactionary ideas, especially on social media.

What are very *real* problems – around the failures in the NHS and public services, on jobs and above all on the availability of affordable housing – have presented an opportunity for white nationalists to scapegoat other marginalized communities, and migrants in particular, for their problems with capitalists.

But these economic and social problems are created by the so-called ‘market’ system, and many of these same households targeted for blame are themselves disproportionately affected

by low pay, unemployment, exclusion, and violence from the police. Black and Asian workers are more likely to live in densely populated urban areas, bearing the brunt of high rents, over-occupancy of homes, poor air quality and all the other ills of capitalism.

Despite progress having been made regarding the rights of LGBT+ workers and greater levels of social acceptance, especially among the young, those rights are now also coming increasingly under attack.

A major part of this offensive is the appalling treatment often given to transgender people. It shows the need for maintaining the greatest possible unity and solidarity between all groups of workers and young people. There is still a long way to go, to combat the widespread miseducation and misinformation about transgender people, many of whom still suffer harassment, violence, and increasing state discrimination and oppression, particularly young trans and non-binary people, in schools and the health services.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many disabled people were all but abandoned and just left to their own devices. It is capitalist society that *disables* people, not the other way around, and young people must support the rights of disabled people in their communities and disabled workers in general.

It is always the case that this system will try to divide workers – and that includes young workers. Today, the right-wing media use desperate asylum seekers and working-class migrants as scapegoats for all the ills of society – and that is to the ultimate cost of youth and the working class.

Young people in general have a proud tradition of fighting against all forms of discrimination – they have been at the forefront in the past in the fight for women's rights, for the

rights of Black and Asian workers and for LGBT rights. Long may that tradition continue!

Young people everywhere must fight all forms of misogyny, racism, ableism, xenophobia, and against all attempts to divide young people and the working class on grounds of gender identity or sexuality.

Young people should demand:

** Protections for marginalized groups in society and the workplace*

** The protection of Black and Asian workers from prejudice, racism, and bias in employment and in education opportunities*

** Proper democratic control and accountability of the police, which needs to be purged of all such bigotry, racism and misogyny*

** Full equality for transgender people at work, in the education system and in the health service. No weakening of their rights under the Equality Act of 2010, or the right to gender-affirmative health care. The right to legal gender self-identification*

** Full equality for disabled people and comprehensive protections in employment and education and in society in general*

** The provision of a safe methods to apply for asylum so there is no need to resort to dangerous sea crossings.*

** Language, employment and housing support for migrants, to enable them to contribute positively to society, rather than being isolated in hostels or hotels*

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

The big majority of young people today have no experience in a trade union and little trust in the leaders of the party that the trade unions created, the Labour Party, though young people are much more likely, on average, to vote Labour than older people.

The 'labour movement' can seem like a *foreign country* to most young people. But that will not always be true.

There are two things that cannot be avoided. The first is that most young people will end up – if they aren't already – in a workplace where all of the positive elements of their wages and conditions – like sick pay, holiday pay, etc – were won by trade unions in the past. None of those things were given voluntarily the bosses. Moreover, young workers will soon realise that their wages and conditions *still depend today* on having strong trade unions.

But the second, is that going forward, the only social force that is capable of changing society for the better – in implementing real, fundamental and lasting change – is the organised working class, the labour movement. It is in the *workplace* – whether it is an office, a shop, a school or a factory – that workers, including young workers, are naturally and *instinctively* forced to join together to fight for their rights.

The trade union movement has changed significantly over the decades. It has been shaped by events, like the massive de-industrialisation of the Thatcher/Major years (1979-97), when mining, heavy-engineering and ship-building all but disappeared, and later by the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

These crises have caused hundreds of thousands of jobs to disappear, undermining, for many, what security of employment had remained. From Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s onwards, successive Tory governments legislated to weaken the trade unions, which were not repealed by past Labour governments. Inevitably, these anti-union laws have hampered the effectiveness of the unions.

As of today, the total membership of the trade unions is significantly lower than in the 1980s, particularly in the private sector, where only 12% of workers are unionised. Furthermore, women's membership in the private sector is even lower, with only 1 in 10 workers being members.

The employment situation, especially for young people leaving school or university, was worsened by Tory austerity measures so that millions of young people can only find work in the lowest-paid, least secure jobs, in retail, catering and in the gig economy. These sectors are the least well-organised, and this is a key reason why union membership among young people has significantly decreased over the years.

Because so many young people are employed in the gig economy, and they face more most precarious conditions, without union representation, the result is a high turnover of staff, further reinforcing the difficulty of organising effectively.

Unfortunately, some trade unions make themselves less attractive to young workers because of their bureaucratic structures and support for right-wing Labour leaders. It is as if the unions have deviated from their core values. While there has been an increase in membership in recent years, unions have struggled to engage with younger workers, especially those in the gig economy.

Having said that, although there was a significant decline in union membership among 16-19-year-olds between 2008 and 2017, there has been a slight increase since 2018. Currently, 3.2% of 16-19-year-olds and 8.4% of those under 24 belong to a union.

Media commentators often speak of a '*generational divide*' among workers, with younger generations in the least well-paid and most insecure jobs – often with no trade unions to back them up – and older workers in better-paid, more secure jobs, where the unions are stronger. There is such a divide, and it is leading to young people becoming increasingly disenchanted with the system and to lean towards left-wing ideas and a call for *real change*.

The potential of the unions was shown in the increase in membership in 2023, when 90,000 people enrolled, as a direct result of the strike action undertaken by unions over pay and conditions. New layers of workers began to take notice of their working conditions and to join unions to fight for change in their workplace.

At one point last year more than two million workers were engaged in struggle through their unions: train drivers, teachers, civil servants, lecturers, nurses, junior doctors and many more. This shows that prioritising the interests of union members yields results.

Mobilising young workers and *empowering* them within the Labour Party and trade unions are vital to advancing socialist ideals and resisting being the victims of the crises of capitalism. But part of empowering young people must also be increasing the voice of young members in the trade unions. Many trade unions have 'sections' specifically for young members, but they could be made far more effective.

If trade union youth sections were democratic, and allowed a degree of autonomy, to meet and discuss in local, regional and national conferences, to plan recruitment and organisation; they could be much more attractive to young workers. Young people working for Starbucks, McDonalds, Deliveroo, and so on, would find it easier to engage with trade union organisers and officials if their union contacts were of the same age and outlook as themselves.

Young people should demand:

- * The right to join a union, and to be represented in the workplace*
- * The repeal of all anti-trade union laws*
- * The expansion of democracy in the trade union and the organisation of democratic and autonomous youth sections in all unions, to help the recruitment of young workers*
- * Full protections at work, better terms of employment, good training and decent pay.*
- * Full equality at work for all young people.*

THE ANSWER TO THE CRISIS IS SOCIALISM

Young people and students are not asking for the Moon. They are not asking for outrageous things.

The right to a decent education.

The right to a decent health service.

The right to a good week's pay for a good week's work.

The right to a roof over our heads.

The right to fair and equal treatment

In the modern world, science and technology can create and do things that a hundred years ago would have seemed like miracles. So today, none of these demands are 'extreme' or outlandish.

But the one thing that stands in the way of modern society providing us with all the basic necessities of life is an economic system based on greed, profit and the enrichment of a tiny proportion of the population. That system is capitalism.

The challenges facing young people have worsened over the past fourteen years of Tory government, replaced at last in the recent general election. But the only way to address these issues and to force the new government to act in the interests of young people and the working class in general is through *political action*.

Young people need to participate in the mass movements of the working class, and particularly in the trade unions. Through those unions that affiliate to the Labour Party – which created it in the first place, and which still provide its mass social basis

– it is possible to fight to change its leadership, policies and direction.

Democratisation of the economy by public ownership

To be able to provide the basic necessities of life for young workers and students and for working people as a whole, the labour movement needs to write on its banner the slogans of genuine socialism.

Socialism simply means the *democratisation of the economy* – by the public ownership of all the big companies in manufacturing, transport, utilities, land and all the main levers of economic power.

These companies at present base all their decisions and investment on greed and profit for a tiny minority. But they need to be owned by the public and managed democratically in the interests of the majority of the population. In that way, an economy can be *planned* to benefit the Many, not the Few.

It is workers, including young workers, who create all the wealth in the country. Is it not reasonable, then, for workers to use the wealth they create for the benefit of society as a whole?

Why should it be that building workers cannot afford the houses that they build? Why should it be that young baristas are not paid enough to live on, while the likes of Starbucks make millions from the coffees they make and get away with dodging taxes year after year?

Those who steal the wealth that workers create need to have their power and wealth taken away. If the wealth and resources of the country were owned and *planned* in a democratic and rational way, it would be possible to build enough affordable homes for all. Take away the barrier of

private profit and we could have health and education systems that worked for all.

There could be proper investment in infrastructure and a planned switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Workers could work a four-day week, with decent pay and conditions. Young workers and students could have a direct democratic input into their workplace organisations, training and educational institutions. No more decisions behind closed doors and beyond democratic accountability

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO NOW

This youth charter is offered to help people understand is at stake and how it is possible to bring about political change. For us, socialism is not just an 'idealistic' concept but is something concretely relevant and rooted in the material needs of young people.

Young people have the intelligence, determination, and spirit to challenge the billionaires who control our working conditions and wages. Young people have the energy and a direct interest in fighting to save the planet from the climate emergency. But we also need clear ideas and policies and a sense of direction about what we want and how to get it.

The last youth charter to be published was over 50 years ago, by the Labour Party Young Socialists. Yet, at that time, the prospects for young people were much better than they are now. Austerity has had a major impact on most young workers

in Britain and worldwide, drastically reducing opportunities for good employment, housing, and living standards.

Left-Horizons, is a socialist website that provides reports, articles, analyses and comments on all political issues nationally and internationally. It has sponsored this booklet with the aim of assisting in the mobilisation of young people on the largest possible scale to fight for their needs.

Organise yourselves

Young people and students need to fight the false narrative of capitalism that "*anyone can succeed*". It is simply not true, no matter how hard you study and work. It is *capitalism* that is creating inequality and injustice for young people and it is capitalism that young people need to help to overthrow.

If you agree with what is in this Charter, talk to other young workers and students. Organise yourselves. Plan protests, rallies and meetings to demand real social change. Students and youth are entitled to publicise their needs and grievances and to engage in political actions and demonstrations, though care needs to be taken to take actions that target the bosses rather than ordinary working people.

Picket local town halls with placards – "*where are the affordable homes?*". Organise street protests in your area. Reach out to workers' organisations and the labour movement. Support trade unions when they have picket lines or protests of their own.

Political thought without any action can be pointless but, equally, political action without proper thought can easily lead nowhere.

So above all, discuss and debate political ideas. There is a wealth of material on the *Left Horizons* website to provide the

basis of hundreds of discussions. You can contact *Left Horizons* at editor@left-horizons.co.uk if you need help or advice contacting others or organising. You can also help us build *Left Horizons* as a group, to spread and develop the ideas of socialism.

Only if young workers and students educate themselves and organise to demand the kind of things outlined in this charter will it be possible to combat the injustices and inequalities they face. We must fight for the right to organise in workplaces, schools, colleges and universities. We must strive for a political party that really represents the aspirations of the working class. A better future can be ours, but we need to fight for it.

**YOUNG WORKERS AND
STUDENTS:**

FIGHT FOR YOUR FUTURE!

FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM!