

YOUTH CHARTER



**Building a brighter future
for Britain's youth**

Introduction

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic engulfed Britain, from any perspective the outlook for young people under capitalism was grim.

We face a looming economic crisis, ten years in the making, accelerated and made more acute by the economic shock resulting from the pandemic. A climate crisis is unfolding before our eyes that threatens to destroy the world during our lifetimes and leave it unable to sustain human society as we know it.

The lives of young people in Britain are characterised by insecurity, uncertainty and poverty, regardless of the path we choose or are forced into. A decade of austerity has left our public services, the education system and our NHS stripped to the bone. There is no longer even a pretence of providing access to quality public education and cultural and leisure facilities for working class youth.

The options for most of those in work are low-paid, precarious and unfulfilling jobs with little chance of progression, poverty-pay apprenticeships or complete uncertainty in the gig economy. College and university students are forced to place additional financial pressure on their already strained families and jeopardise their studies by working long hours to support themselves. Education has been reduced to a product to be bought and sold for a questionable financial gain.

We are living through an epidemic in mental health problems among young people. Violent crime and anti-social behaviour are escalating across our society, with a disproportionate impact on the youth.

Capitalism in Britain has presented us with two options: accept the system as it is and a life without dignity or to fight back and live life with a purpose. Britain's young communists are clear on our choice. Where working people are prepared to struggle there is always hope and the youth have always led from the front.

This Youth Charter is a set of policies to combat the immediate crisis faced by Britain's youth and to offer some relief. The Charter isn't a recipe for socialism. These policies can't cure the underlying problems of capitalism but these demands and the struggle to achieve them ask the fundamental questions about economic ownership and democratic control in our country. They would make a massive difference to the lives of the millions of young people in Britain today.

These aren't just policies for the YCL, these are demands for the broad working class and student movements which can be translated into the thousands of struggles taking place every day in our schools, campuses, communities and workplaces.

November 2020

Youth Charter

Our Demands

- 1. A real living wage and an end to casualisation and age discrimination in pay**
- 2. A new apprenticeship system and real jobs with trade union and employment rights**
- 3. More council housing and private sector rent controls**
- 4. Public transport network cards for young people with capped affordable prices**
- 5. Free college and university education**
- 6. Free access to government and council cultural, leisure and sports facilities**
- 7. Free access to all NHS Healthcare and improved mental and sexual health services**
- 8. The right to vote at 16**
- 9. An end to all forms of discrimination**
- 10. Fight to prevent climate change**

For more information and resources please visit:
www.ycl.org.uk/youth-charter



1

A real living wage, an end to casualisation and age discrimination in pay

Britain's young communists are calling for:

- **A real living wage for all workers of at least £10 per hour plus a London weighting.**
- **An end to pay differentials for workers under 25 and age discrimination in pay.**
- **A ban on zero hours and non-permanent contracts, day one employment rights and the right to equal treatment with permanent and full-time workers.**

12.7% of 16 - 24 year olds are unemployed compared to 3.9% for the whole population. Those in work face endemic low pay. 1 in 5 young people are paid less than the minimum wage, and 78% of 18 - 21 year-olds earn less than the government's National 'Living' Wage (not to be confused with the real Living Wage).

Discrimination according to age means that young workers are legally paid significantly less. As at April 2020, the hourly rates by age are as follows: 25 and over, £8.72; 21-24, £8.20; 18-20, £6.45; under 18, £4.55; and apprentices, £4.15. There are at least 900,000 workers on zero-hours contracts in Britain, comprising 2.9% of those in work. 36% of them are aged 16-24.

Very recent research by the TUC indicates that the gig economy continues to expand rapidly. An estimated 4.7 million workers have undertaken such work in some form. Up to 1 in 10 working-age adults are now using gig economy platforms, up from 1 in 20 in 2016.

Gig economy workers face a double hit of poverty wages plus no guarantee of earnings, and weaker employment rights (no holiday, sick pay, protection from dismissal etc), often as a result of bogus 'self-employment'.

Young people are far more likely to be forced into this new, exploitative and precarious form of work: 31.5% of workers using gig economy platforms are aged 16-24 and a further 28.7% are aged 25-34.

The Charter's policies would make an immediate and substantial improvement to the lives of the vast majority of young workers in Britain, improving living and working conditions and guaranteeing a genuine minimum for all – regardless of age. The changes will help bring about the end of division and exploitation of workers based on age, undermining the hand of the bosses and strengthening the ability of the trade union movement to fight for gains for all workers.



2

**A new
apprenticeship
system and
real jobs
with trade
union and
employment
rights**

Britain's young communists are calling for:

- **A new government backed apprenticeship system focused on real skills and real jobs with a real living wage and day one trade union and employment rights.**
- **A statutory right to an apprenticeship or a two year work placement for all school leavers up to the age of 25 with a real living wage.**
- **To make these new jobs possible we need public ownership and investment in utilities and key industries to rebuild Britain's economy.**

Apprentices are subjected to the deplorable poverty wage of £3.90 an hour. However, research by the TUC has found that of the 900,000 apprentices in England, 135,000 weren't even being paid that. Freedom of Information requests have revealed that, between January 2016 and June 2017 (the most recent data), the government had prosecuted fewer than 5 employers for failure to pay the apprenticeship minimum wage. Most companies only pay 10% of training costs with the government subsidising the other 90%. The vast majority of apprentices have no guarantee of a job on completion of their apprenticeship.

The whole apprenticeship system itself has become a target for large companies looking to exploit young workers and government funding. For example, McDonalds offering Hospitality Team Member 'apprenticeships', Boots and Superdrug offering 'apprenticeships' in Retail Level 2. In reality these are a scam offering no real vocational training and allowing bosses to exploit government funding and pay young workers poverty wages for the same work as non-apprentice workers.

It is little wonder then that apprenticeship uptake has entered a period of decline. The number of new starts in England was down from 509,000 in 2015/16 to 376,000 in 2017/18. Welsh figures tell a similar story, having fallen by almost 20% in November 2018 – January 2019 compared to the same period in 2017/18.

We need a new national government backed apprenticeship system focused on real skills and real jobs with a real living wage and day one trade union and employment rights. This can only really be implemented and achieved in the context of public ownership of utilities and state investment to rebuild Britain's manufacturing sector.

If implemented the demands in our Charter could see the return of a genuine apprenticeship system which provides a real option for young workers in addition to further and higher education. This would enable the creation of hundreds of thousands of quality jobs across Britain, with targeted investment to provide a bright future for young workers and their communities.



3

**More
council
housing
and private
sector rent
control**

Britain's young communists are calling for:

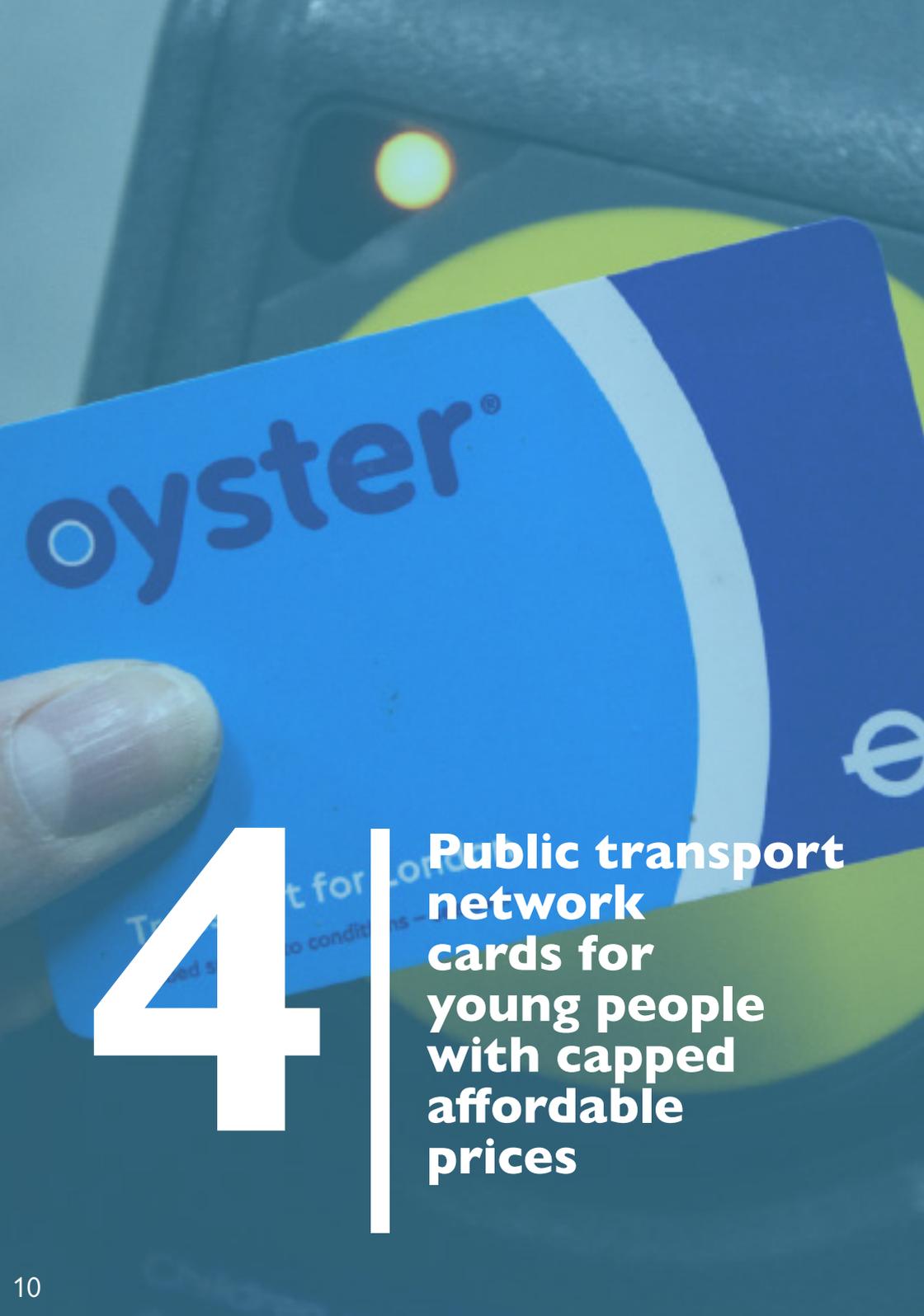
- **A million new municipally owned council houses to be built within the next 5 years with a minimum supply of 200,000 new council houses per year afterwards.**
- **Guaranteed local authority council placements for the young people up to the age of 30.**
- **A points-based system of private sector rent control attached to the value of the property. The creation of Rent Commissions for England, Scotland and Wales to enforce the new system and a Rent Affordability Index to ensure access to housing in all areas.**
- **A statutory right to affordable university and college accommodation for students on full time courses.**
- **Collective bargaining rights for tenants unions against council and social housing providers and private sector landlords with two or more properties.**

The recent period has seen a sharp and accelerating return to Victorian values in housing with young people feeling the effects most acutely.

For the vast majority of young people, council or social housing (independent of their family) is not a realistic option, since the majority of councils and housing associations are struggling to allocate accommodation to those with priority status. Therefore they are forced into the private rented sector, which has expanded massively since the 2008 financial crisis. The number of households in the sector has increased from 2.8 million in 2007 to 4.5 million in 2017. 25 - 34 year-olds make up 35% of these households with 16-24 year-olds accounting for about a further 10%. Private renters spend on average 46% of their income on rent compared with 18% from mortgage-payers.

For most young people home ownership is an increasingly unattainable dream. Only 60% of 25 - 34 year-olds in England would have been able to borrow enough to buy one of the cheapest home in their area – even if they had saved a 10% deposit (by no means a given). In London the figure was only around one third. In 1996, across the whole country, it was 90%. Millions of young people are being denied their independence. High rents and house prices mean that in 2018 there were 3.4 million 20 - 34 year-olds still living with their parents, up from 2.4 million in 2003.

Our aim is to give young workers and students dignity and options in housing rather than being forced in all cases to line the pockets of exploitative private sector landlords. This would go a long way in tackling slum standard housing, rebuilding solid communities, providing security for tenants and freeing up young people's income for leisure and cultural activities.



oyster®

4

**Public transport
network
cards for
young people
with capped
affordable
prices**

Britain's young communists are calling for:

- **Fixed price public transport network cards with capped affordable prices for everyone under 30, providing unlimited access to the local and national rail, bus and city transport networks.**
- **Nationalisation of rail and intercity bus services and local authority control of urban and rural bus services.**
- **Improved public transport links for rural and islands communities to enable young people to live, work and study in their communities.**

For decades Britain's public transport network has been carved up and privatised. Successive Tory governments have sold off our national utilities to the highest bidder. We have still been paying massive subsidies to private rail companies such as Virgin and Carillion and footing the bill for bailouts when things go wrong.

The big winners have been monopolies and parasite transport firms. The big losers are working people and Britain's youth. We pay 200% more in subsidies to the private rail companies now – over £5 billion a year – than we did pre-privatisation. Services are worse, routes are significantly reduced, and we have the most expensive ticket prices in Europe.

Rail prices rose again this year by 2.7% across Britain costing commuters at least £100 more a year on average. This will hit the youth hardest due to stagnant wages and the rising costs of living.

Like the rail network, bus privatisation has been a total failure. Outside London, passenger numbers have fallen by half and average prices have risen 35% above inflation since the 1980s. It's a shambles for passengers but a money spinner for bus companies who have made billions for their shareholders and who are still cutting services across the country.

The environmental benefits from more people using electric trains and buses and having less cars on the roads are clear and would decrease our carbon footprint substantially. This will only happen if cheaper fares are introduced on trains. Within our rural areas where there are very few train stations, we need better bus travel with cheaper rates. For far too long our rural areas have been left behind in terms of public transport.

The Charter's demands would put Britain firmly back on a public ownership of transport model. With planning and investment, rebuilding our infrastructure could form the backbone of a Green New Deal and hundreds of thousands of jobs and apprenticeships. Fixed low price public transport network cards will allow young people to work, study and travel and more easily pursue the future that they want.



5

Free
college
and
university
education

Britain's young communists are calling for:

- **Free college and university education for all courses.**
- **The replacement of student loans with a guaranteed bursary for all students.**
- **The reintroduction and extension of Education Maintenance Allowance for students across Britain.**

Austerity has impacted on all aspects of our society, particularly education. Education is also a key area of division between England, Wales and Scotland. In Scotland, university students do not pay for tuition fees, meanwhile in England, most students' pay over £9000 a year. A key campaigning aim of the YCL, in support of student organisations, is the complete removal of these sky high fees. We're fighting to scrap tuition fees entirely in further and higher education and to bring back student grants.

Across Britain the education system is suffering as a result of underinvestment. While Scottish university students do not pay fees for their degrees, its incorrect to say we get "free education". Abolishing tuition fees comes at a price, and we too have come under attack from Westminster policies abolishing grants and bursaries supporting the poorest of students. Similarly, to fund "free education", the Scottish Government have cut hundreds of thousands of college places. Colleges represent a key educational sector, particularly for working class young people. The YCL demands increased college funding across Britain so that everyone has access to education.

However, fees and cuts are not the only problem facing higher and further education system. The YCL demands an end to the increased marketisation of the sector. Increasingly, education staff are employed on short-term highly casualised contracts. This does a disservice not only to teaching staff, most of whom have spent years of their lives developing their expertise, but also to students who deserve the very best that staff have to offer. The YCL stands with education unions in their fight against increasing commercialisation. Education should be a fundamental right for all, not a profit making exercise designed to promote the next business leaders. The YCL fully supports campaigns from trade unions and student unions to increase investment in education.

Education is a basic right and should be funded through taxation. We aim to scrap academies and free schools, integrating all religious, trust, academy and private schools back into a unified and secular education system, bringing an end to privilege in education. Quality education should not have a price tag attached. As young people, we understand that not everybody learns in the same way, but that does not make them any less capable or any less valuable.



6

**Free access to
government
and council
cultural,
leisure
and sports
facilities**

Britain's young communists are calling for:

- **Free access to council run leisure centres and facilities, with efforts to encourage regular use among all young people.**
- **Free access to all museums and historical sites for all under 30s.**
- **An expansion of youth centres, to give young people a friendly and open place to gather and socialise outside of school or work.**
- **Investment in our libraries and free nationwide access for everyone under 30.**
- **An expansion of youth sports clubs, with government funding to enable everyone to be able to participate.**
- **A national scheme to allow under 30s to visit theatre performances for free every month and free access to youth theatre and drama classes.**

There have been massive cuts to local authority budgets for leisure facilities in recent years. An increase in budget and free membership would massively boost membership and quality of the facilities. This will help in keeping people fit and healthy, without locking out those without the means to afford it. Only 17.5% of young people are active for one hour every day. Free access to team sports such as football would help contribute to combating this dangerous trend.

Since 2011 there has been a 52% drop in council supported youth centres, and 88% of councils have reported closing at least one youth centre in their area. Youth crime has spiked in the same period.

The Arts Council for England found that in most areas the poorest 20% of the population made only 10% of theatre bookings. Theatre's and music halls, despite the latter's working class origins, are often expensive and inaccessible to working class youth, robbing them of an art form that working class people heavily contributed to, and in the case of musical theatre, created. As well as being priced out of enjoying our own culture, the working class youth are priced out of taking part in them. A recent Arts Council of England report indicated "regressing social mobility" was present in the arts, and noted that a lack of entry points, and low pay was a large reason why. A very fun and dynamic industry is almost entirely dominated by privately educated people, and free access would begin to end this stranglehold.

Access to culture, leisure and sports are a fundamental right in a society which provides young people with a dignified life. We facing crises in mental and physical health and anti-social behaviour. Access to the cultural, leisure and sports heritage of our class and our country have been stripped away by privatisation and successive right wing governments. The Charter's policies would be the beginning of the reversal of this dangerous and damaging trend.



THANK
YOU

NHS

7

Free access
to all NHS
healthcare
and improved
mental and
sexual health
services

Britain's young communists are calling for:

- **Free access to all NHS services including prescriptions, dental and optician services.**
- **Increased access to mental and sexual health services for young people, especially in deprived working class and rural areas.**
- **A new sexual health and sex educational syllabus aimed at combatting sexual violence and abuse.**
- **Better access to healthcare for young disabled people and support to enter education and employment.**

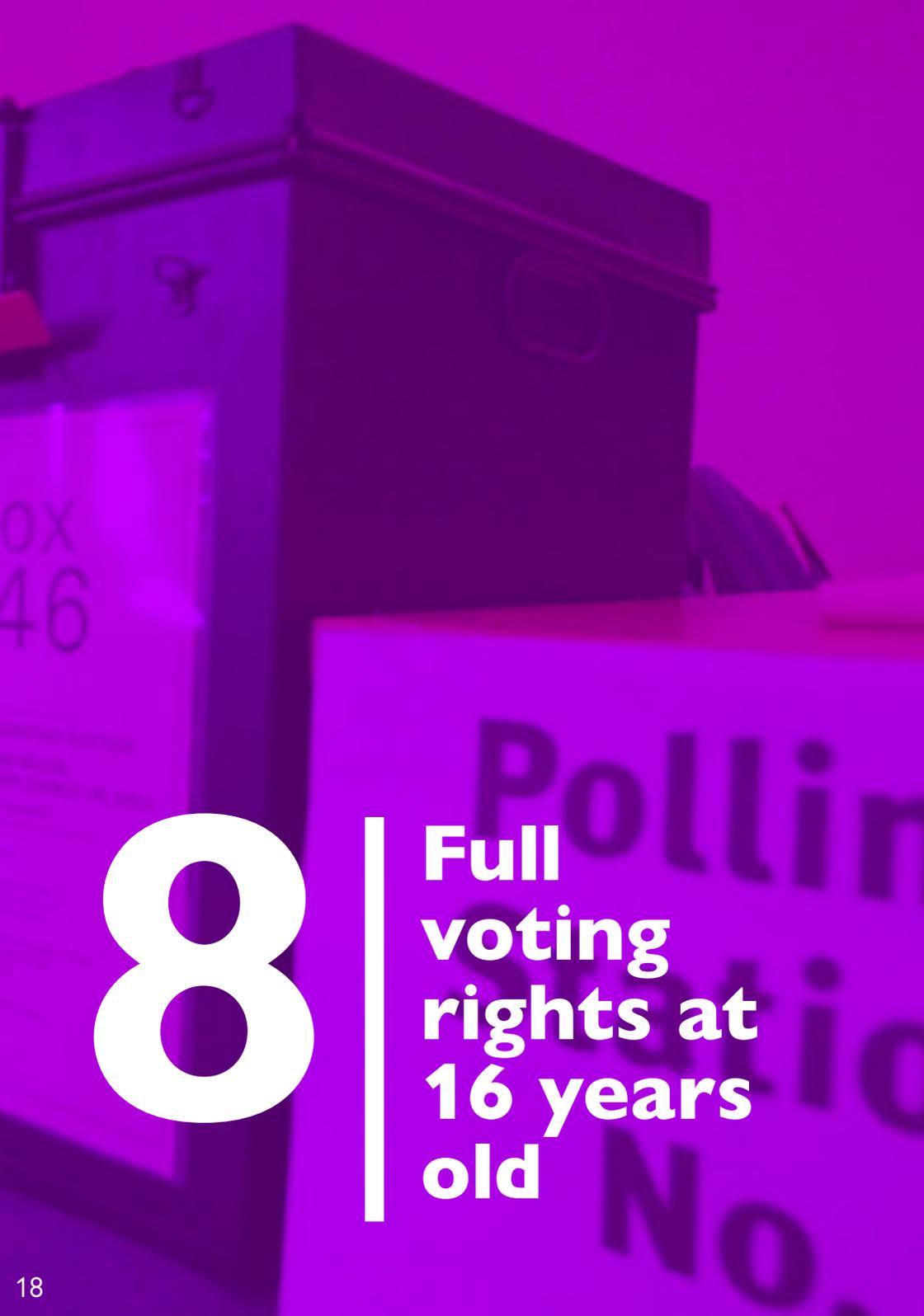
Where a child is born and the conditions they are raised in determine the future trajectory of their entire life. 30% of children, 4.1 million, were living in poverty in Britain in 2017-2018. The number is expected to increase to 5.2 million by 2022. 70% of children in poverty come from working families; while 45% from ethnic minority families are in poverty, compared with 26% from white families. Child poverty has a deep and wide-ranging effect during early years and later in life including poor mental and physical health and academic underachievement.

Millions of working class children are prevented from receiving the healthcare they need through lack of key health services and charges for essential prescriptions, dental care and optician services. This is yet another barrier thrown up preventing working class children from reaching their full potential. Over the recent period we have seen a surge in mental health problems among young people. Half of all mental health problems begin during childhood and 75% before the age of 24. Suicide is the biggest cause of death between the ages of 20-34 in Britain.

Women and LGBT youth are even more likely to suffer from mental health problems. Despite this, young people across Britain are forced to wait months for any treatment. For too many the wait is too long. Another product of the economic situation has been rising youth involvement in epidemic levels of violent crime that received significant media coverage in 2019. 4,500 knife and offensive weapon offences were committed by children in 2017/2018, a 7% increase on the previous year, with levels increasing year on year since 2014.

Sexually transmitted diseases and under-age pregnancy continue to be a major problem among young people across Britain. Sex education in our schools is completely inadequate. Increasing numbers of children and young people are exposed to graphic hardcore pornography before learning about consent and what a healthy relationship is. This has to change.

The demands of our Charter aim to provide a healthcare system that works for working class young people. As well as fighting the poverty, exploitation and alienation which is the cause of these social problems, we need to provide real measures now and to support the millions of young people across Britain to realise their full potential.



8

**Full
voting
rights at
16 years
old**

Britain's young communists are calling for:

- **The immediate extension of full voting rights to all 16 and 17 year olds.**

Young people in Britain are being denied their democratic rights. The case for votes at 16 couldn't be clearer.

There are over 1.3 million 16 and 17 year olds in Britain. Young workers and students are passionate about politics. Our lives and our futures are determined by the decisions of politicians and the outcomes of elections and referendums.

Young workers and students are affected by specific challenges and problems. We are entitled to a full voice and political representation to defend our rights and improve our lives. This simple change would increase democratic participation and inspire young people to get involved in politics.

16 and 17 year olds can work and pay tax, get married or join the army but we can't vote.

Participation in free elections is a fundamental human right, protected under the Human Rights Act and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

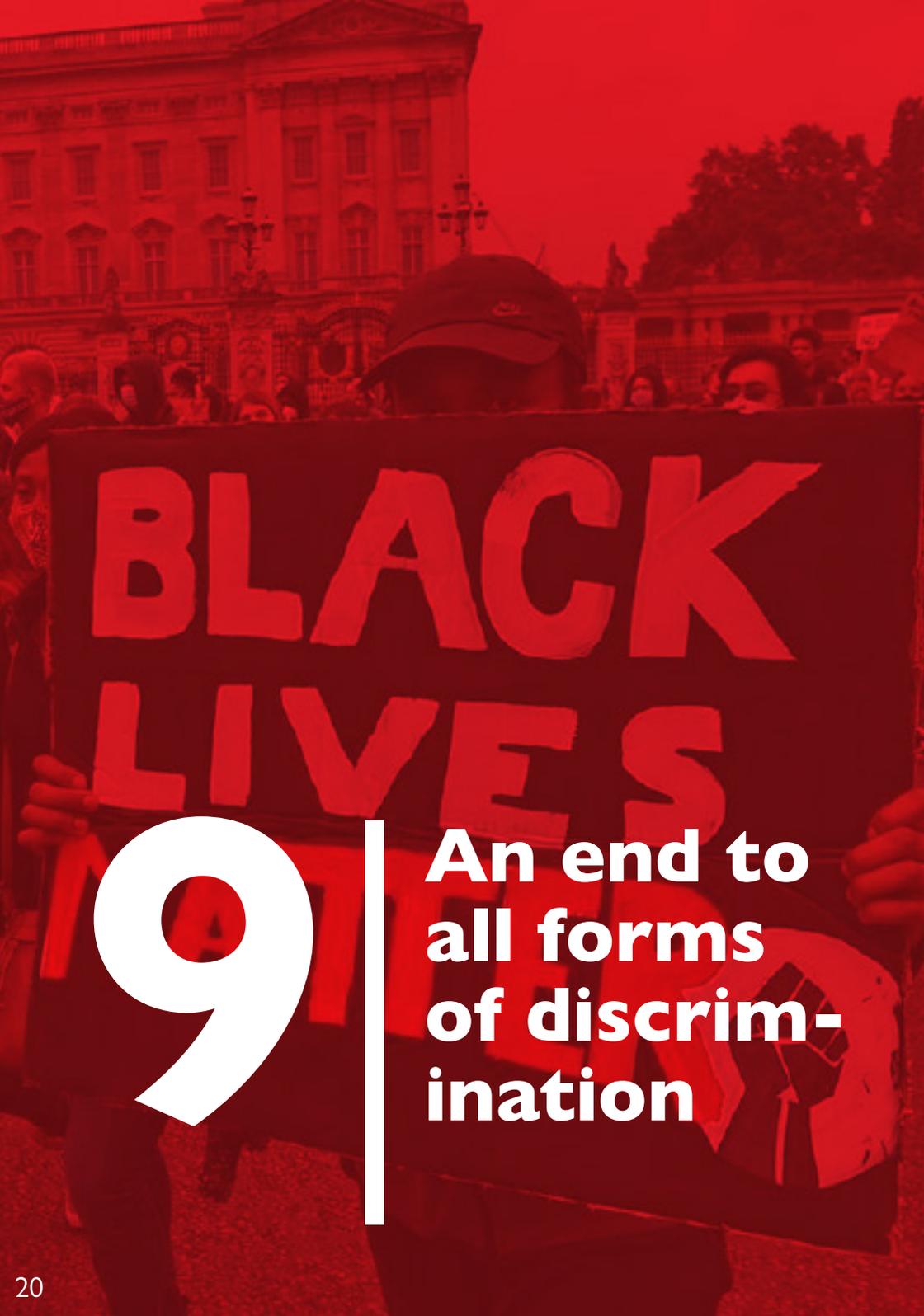
16 year olds are already entitled to vote in local elections, elections in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, and elections to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Parliament.

From Austria to Cuba and many places in between, millions of 16 and 17 year olds are already empowered to vote in many other countries across the world.

Polling indicates that if 16 and 17 year olds had been able to vote, the outcome of the 2019 General Election would have been markedly different.

Achieving this objective would be a massive expansion of the democratic rights of young workers and students in Britain and an end to age discrimination at the ballot box. The case is clear not just in our country but around the world.

Votes at 16 would strengthen the ability of Britain's young workers and students to defend and advance our rights as part of the working class, labour and student movements. Britain's young communists are unequivocal about the right to and the need for the youth to hold their future in their own hands.



9

An end to
all forms
of discrim-
ination

Britain's young communists are calling for:

- **Serious Government strategies for the advancement of social rights for women, LGBT+ people, disabled people, and BAEM people. The current and historical inequalities must be corrected with long-term grassroots and institutional action.**
- **Real education about sexism, racism, LGBTphobia and other forms of oppression and discrimination at schools, colleges and universities, in addition to inclusive teaching.**
- **Enhanced means to prosecute unequal and discriminatory pay.**
- **Ring-fenced funding and support for victims of gender-based, racial and other hate crimes and violence.**
- **Youth-led organisation in schools, colleges and universities to crack down on sexual violence and harassment and bullying.**
- **Defeat the Conservative Government's consultation on "strengthening police powers to tackle unauthorised encampments" aiming to further criminalise Gypsies and Travellers.**

In Britain today, the capitalist media claims that sexism, racism, LGBTphobia and other forms of oppression and discrimination have been or are being defeated, but in actual fact:

- Although equal pay is enshrined in law, women workers still earn either 16.2% (part time) or 13.1% (full time) less than men on average.
- 2 women per week are killed due to gender-based violence with BAEM women suffering disproportionately. Girls in schools experience extreme amounts of sexual violence and harassment.
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, followed by Black African and Black Caribbean communities, are the most likely to be in persistent poverty. Substandard housing, homelessness, unemployment and low wages all disproportionately affect these minorities.
- LGBT+ people are at a greater risk of mental health problems, suicide, experiencing hate crimes and lower qualities of life than heterosexual people.
- Since 2008, cuts to public services have affected disabled people 9 times more than non-disabled people, halting and reversing progress to equality.
- The way of life of Gypsies and Travellers continues to be criminalised. The Government aims to criminalise encampments, or increase evictions, even though 65% of police consulted said the lack of sites was the real problem.

Communists fight for real human rights for all working people. Although people may be different, we are part of a working class that shares fundamental common interests and needs. Our Charter calls for immediate and substantial action to tackle systemic inequality in Britain and to enable oppressed and minority groups and working people to advance the struggle for their own rights.

A green-tinted photograph of a wind turbine in a field. The turbine is the central focus, with its three blades extending outwards. The background shows a rolling landscape under a clear sky. The overall color scheme is a vibrant green.

10 | Fight to prevent climate change

Britain's young communists are calling for:

- **A Green New Deal and investment in useful infrastructure such as warm well-insulated buildings and flood protection. Britain could take the lead in renewable energy, putting solar panels on the roof of every school, and that work would create thousands of jobs for skilled workers on guaranteed union contracts.**
- **Uphold international commitments on climate change. Britain should work in good faith to reduce carbon emissions, without punishing the global south along the way.**
- **An all-Britain Land Commission, working on the same lines as the Scottish Land Commission, to scrutinise large land-owners and the power to recommend and enforce land reforms.**
- **The take over of the remaining private estates. The working class should have the right to freely walk on the land, navigate the rivers and enjoy all the countryside has to offer. Communists have historically taken a leading role in the struggle for land rights, and there is too much of our country still fenced off by the old landed elites.**
- **Support agricultural and village co-operatives to help to renew rural areas, ploughing revenue back into local communities. Co-ordination of supplies and collective planning of production would protect farmers from the volatility of harvest conditions as well as from exploitation by the big supermarkets.**

Re-usable straws at the big brand coffee shop will not save the planet, there is no technological magic bullet either. We can only achieve a clean environment by challenging the self-destructive tendency of capitalism, by re-orienting the whole economy towards sustainable growth. Capitalism has broken the organic relationship between people and nature. The drive to over-accumulation damages our environment and brings us dangerously close to climate catastrophe.

Overseas, British multinationals dig up forests, poison lakes, displace indigenous people, and destroy whole ecosystems. Meanwhile at home, our city centres are transformed into windswept retail parks, interspersed with drab office complexes. In 2019, 36 out of 43 air quality zones in Britain recorded average levels of air pollution which were over the legal safe limit.

We don't want to live in suburban hell, we want a country of clean air, clear flowing rivers, and fresh healthy food.

The demands in our Charter would ensure that the fight against climate change, the fight for a future for humankind, is the foremost priority. We're calling for a Green New Deal which puts workers first, a Deal which will create hundreds of thousands of new quality jobs and revitalises Britain's towns and cities.

CHALLENGE



THE VOICE OF BRITAIN'S YOUTH

Challenge has been the journal of the Young Communist League since 1935. It survived the Second World War, the Cold War and the nineties.

It's now dragging itself into the 21st Century with a new website, providing the news and views of Britain's communist youth.

WWW.CHALLENGE-MAGAZINE.ORG



WE HAVE A WORLD TO WIN!



JOIN THE COMMUNISTS!



Produced by the Young Communist League of Britain

Ruskin House, 23 Coombe Road, Croydon CR0 1BD

office@ycl.org.uk / www.ycl.org.uk