There are now 6.5 million workers in the UK who are part of the “working poor.” There are now more people who are both working and in poverty than people who are officially unemployed. There are more employed people in rent arrears than there are people officially unemployed!

When the BBC screened a new adaptation of Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol in December, the right-wing press and commentators slammed it. Perhaps part of this was because the drama had a contemporary theme. It made you feel that Victorian poverty wasn’t so very far away from Britain in 2020.

The Conservative Party mantra of “making work pay” is refuted in the lives of over six million people where work is no route out of poverty. Work, for many, has become the modern equivalent of the Victorian workhouse.

Throughout the nineties and noughties, many well-paid, secure jobs were wiped out, in manufacturing, public services and other sectors. In many sectors, such as retail and the caring professions, government subsidies were introduced to mask the scandal of low-paying employers.

Rather than the trade union leaders mobilising workers to fight against low pay, they never did. Well-paid jobs have become scarcer - and government subsidies have all but gone.

To ‘make work pay’ we need to start by forcing bosses to pay decent wages that reflect the real cost of living. The Socialist Party demands a minimum wage of at least £12 an hour as an immediate step towards £15.

We need cheap and affordable rents through council housing and rent caps, and housing benefit that matches the real cost of housing.

We need our travel expenses to be affordable. We need childcare costs that don’t prohibit us from being able to afford to work. We need to cut the working week without a loss of pay and share work out - it’s illogical to have some toiling for 70 hours a week while others can’t get anything but a part-time job. In short, we need socialist policies.

Just like today, in Dickens’ day the bosses’ profits boomed. They hoarded and speculated while those who toiled suffered.

Now, as then, we need a militant trade union fightback and a mass party to represent organised workers in the struggle against poverty, low pay and inequality.
‘POST-BREXIT’ ERA OF CRISIS AHEAD

Brexit Day has been and gone. Now Johnson is promising the ‘dawn of a new era’. According to the Tories’ optimistic script a ‘Brexit bounce’ will mean more investment, more jobs and more money to ‘level up’ spending and ‘pay back’ those working-class people who voted for the Tories in the general election.

With an 80-seat majority and Brexit ‘out of the way’ the old Tory divisions are supposedly now healed and a period of growth and stability will open up before us. The chancellor Sajid Javid has pledged to restore the economy to its “post-war glory days” with growth of 2.7%-2.8%. But just last week the Bank of England downgraded its growth forecast by the largest amount since 2016.

This year it expects the economy to ‘grow’ by just 0.8%, the worst level for over ten years. An economist at the think tank IPPR called Javid’s growth goal “a fantasy”. In an already uncertain international economic environment made more fragile by the possible repercussions from the coronavirus (see page 4), and with the worst slowdown in productivity in Britain for 256 years, why would the capitalists rush to invest?

Johnson’s boast that austerity is over has been exposed by Javid ordering government departments to make at least 5% cuts in areas that do not correspond with the government’s priorities - not to mention the councils all over the country which are about to vote through budgets slashing local services already pared to the bone (see page 11).

Tory infighting has broken out over Johnson’s decision to allow Huawei licences for building part of the 5G internet network, and with anaemic economic growth, the economic reality of Brexit on a capitalist basis is likely to be less investment, job losses and factory closures - causing enormous anger and bitterness among those working-class people who might have hoped that getting Brexit done would have the opposite effect.

So far Johnson has leaned towards policies aimed at shoring up working-class support. So, as well as promising increased public spending and not going ahead with a rise in corporation tax, he has intervened to give tax breaks to Flybe, a regional airline, and to bring Northern Rail into public ownership. But if the budget for current spending on public services is going to be balanced by 2022-23, as Javid has pledged, and with anaemic economic growth, the economic resources for intervening and ‘leveling up’ will be extremely limited. In fact, according to calculations by the Financial Times, if the Bank of England forecasts play out, Javid will be facing a budget deficit of £12 billion rather than the surplus of £5 billion he is expecting.

Any attempt to raise taxes or borrowing further to pay for increased spending and investment would be fiercely resisted by the free-marketeers and, if it threatened their profits, the capitalists all the Tory politicians ultimately represent.

Far from strong and stable, the ‘new era’ in Britain will be one of crisis in which working-class people will have no choice but to get organised and fight back against the further attacks that are coming their way.
Labour leadership contest and public ownership

Support for public ownership is even higher among young people.

A spokesperson for the right-wing frontrunner Keir Starmer said: “Keir supports expanding common ownership, whether by outright nationalisation or by other forms such as municipals, community organisations or co-operatives: all of which mean services are run for the public, not for shareholders.”

Another right-wing candidate, Lisa Nandy, backs rail nationalisation (who doesn’t?) but opposes public ownership of energy, Rebecca Long-Bailey on the other hand says she supports the Labour Party manifesto.

There may be circumstances where genuine workers’ cooperatives can play a positive role - but Starmer is attempting to blur the lines on what nationalisation is about.

Publicly owned companies should be run not “for the public” under “common ownership” but under democratic workers’ control and management, based on elected committees of service users and representatives of the trade union movement in each workplace, the trade unions nationally, and a government representing working-class interests as a whole.

Compensation should be paid to small shareholders and pension schemes on the basis of proven need. Elected committees, accountable to the working class, could make the call.

To solve the problems faced by both people and the environment requires more than just removing the profit motive from those parts of the economy where it’s clear privatisation has failed - it means removing the grip of big business from society altogether.

Recent figures put it clearly. While austerity has seen wages stagnate over the last decade, the amount paid to shareholders by the UK’s largest companies listed in the FTse 100 has doubled. It reached a record £110 billion last year! Since 2011, another £20 billion a year has been spent by companies on share buybacks in the UK.

Nationalisation of the top 150 companies and banks that dominate the economy would provide the basis to begin democratically planning production, and the use of resources properly, without interference from the 0.1%.
Coronavirus exposes capitalism's weaknesses in healthcare and economy

violent attacks inevitably cause injuries and deaths. Women who were killed by men did not die in isolation but as part of a process of violence.

Recall is the standard definition of the concept of democracy, which means that governments are accountable to the people. The people’s right to recall their representatives is a core democratic principle.

The report suggests that the fight against capital is not just a fight for workers, but for all those who are exploited by the system. The struggle for democracy is a struggle for justice, for equality, and for the right to control our own lives. It is a struggle for the future of humanity.
**Ealing tax office workers under threat**

It is far from certain that the last days of the Ealing Tax office have been numbered. However, workers at the office are not taking their eyes off the prize as the final strike action took place last week.

The strike was called for January 29th to 31st against the closure of the Ealing Tax Office. While the strike action has been called, the Ealing and Hillingdon trade union (PCS) has not called for a strike at this time as the negotiations continue.

In the meantime, the union has written to the Chancellor, John McDonnell, demanding that the tax office be kept open and that the staff be provided with a new workplace.

The union's letter stated: "We urge the Chancellor to reconsider the closure of the Ealing Tax Office and to provide the staff with a new workplace. We are ready to work with the Chancellor to find a solution that is acceptable to all parties involved."

Workplace savings is not the only concern of the union. They are also concerned about the cuts to the National Health Service, which they believe will have a negative impact on the people of Ealing.

The union is calling on the Chancellor to provide a new workplace for the staff and to ensure that the tax office is not closed.

The union's letter concluded: "We will not be deterred by the Chancellor's decision to close the Ealing Tax Office. We will continue to fight for a new workplace for the staff."

The union has already held a number of protests and has called for a national strike in support of the tax office workers.

The Ealing Tax Office workers are not alone in their struggle. Across the country, workers are fighting against cuts to public services and the privatization of public services.

The Ealing Tax Office workers are part of a much larger movement that is fighting against the cuts and the privatization of public services.

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The trade unions must urgently organise the Tory government against their anti-union laws

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The performance of the West Midlands Transport Commission, the current franchise holder for rail services in the West Midlands, is talked about nowhere near often enough, considering the scale of the region’s transport needs and the cost of operating train services. The franchise, worth £740 million a year, has been the subject of regular complaints from passengers and operators alike. While the franchise does run services across four counties, the West Midlands, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire, there is a perception that the service is not of the highest quality. This perception is partly due to the company’s own failings, but also due to a lack of investment in the region’s transport infrastructure.

In the past, the region has been let down by the central government, which has consistently underfunded transport projects. The current franchise holder, Transport for West Midlands, is a joint venture between the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Department for Transport. The company is responsible for running the region’s rail and bus services, as well as managing the £740 million franchise.

But despite this, the region continues to struggle with transport issues. The region has a poorly connected network of trains and buses, with many areas being served by only a few services per day. This can be frustrating for passengers, who often have to wait for long periods to catch a train or bus.

There are also concerns about the quality of the services provided. The region has a history of delays and cancellations, with many passengers reporting poor service levels. This is a particular problem in the more rural areas of the region, where the service is less frequent and less reliable.

The situation is further compounded by the fact that the region is not seeing the same level of investment as other parts of the country. The government has committed to investing £41 billion in rail infrastructure between 2014 and 2019, but only £3.7 billion of that is set to be spent in the West Midlands. This is a concern, as the region has some of the most congested roads and a lack of investment in transport infrastructure could have a significant impact on the region’s economy.

Election promises have been made about the future of transport in the region, with promises of more services and better connectivity. However, these promises have not been matched by investment, and the region continues to struggle with its transport infrastructure.

The situation is also a concern for those who work in the region. Many people rely on public transport to get to work, and the lack of investment in transport infrastructure can make it difficult for them to do so.

But despite these challenges, there is hope for change. The region has a strong history of campaigning for better transport services, and there is a growing awareness of the need for investment in transport infrastructure.

The region is also home to a number of companies that are leading the way in transport innovation. Companies like DLR and Siemens are developing new technologies that could revolutionise the way we travel, and there is a growing interest in the potential of these technologies to transform the region’s transport network.

It is clear that the region needs investment in its transport infrastructure, and that the current government needs to commit to this. But it is also clear that the region has a strong history of campaigning for better transport services, and that there is a growing awareness of the need for investment in transport infrastructure. With this in mind, the region is well placed to take advantage of new technologies and transform its transport network for the better.

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The rich fund the Tories and Blairites, so help fund the working-class fightback

Ian Pattison
Socialist Party membership subs organiser

The Socialist Party needs you to increase your subs. The rich back their own parties. A donors’ dining club has given the Tories £130 million since they were elected in 2010 to keep at bay brutal austerity. Similarly, big business backed Labour under Tony Blair - donating over £9 million in 2003 alone - when they thought the Blairites best served their interests.

The Socialist Party has no rich backers. We rely solely on the support from working-class people - through the subs of our members and from donations. And the last quarter of 2019 was a record for donations.

We raised over £50,000 in fighting fund between October and December, the highest in a three-month period since the millennium. That’s on top of regular donations, sales of the Socialist and pledges to our building fund - which helped us secure our own premises in 2019.

Now we’re asking all our members to increase their regular membership subs. Please think about increasing yours. Can you increase your monthly subs by £30, £40, £50 or more, or if not by a smaller amount? Every extra pound is vitally important.

Ordinary people are still being hit hard by austerity. And now Tory chancellor Sajid Javid is proposing more - 5% cuts, weeks after saying austerity is over.

We say stand firm for socialist policies against the Tories. To Labour councils we say don’t carry out Tory cuts - stand firm like Liverpool council did in the 1980s, with the slogan of “better to break the law than break the poor.” We want our fighting socialist message to be part of every campaign against these terrible cuts.

But we need resources to do so. We need to maintain our premises to continue the production of our weekly colour 16-page Socialist paper and monthly magazine Socialism Today; for our podcast - Socialism - and our website. For leaflets, petitions, posters, banners and flags.

Capitalism worldwide is in crisis - dozens of countries have been rocked by protests against capitalist austerity and oppression. A part of your subs also goes to the Committee for a Workers’ International - CWI, the socialist international organisation the Socialist Party is a part of - to fund the fight for a socialist world.

If you like what we say, join us. But you don’t have to be a member to start making a regular donation.

Defend and fight for warm, safe housing for Samira and everyone

North London Socialist Party

Samira and her family have suffered damp and mouldy housing for ten years.

The Socialist Party took part in a protest - organised by the London Renters Union, at One Housing offices - to defend and fight for warm, safe housing for her.

One Housing agreed to meet representatives and Samira has been offered a visit from a senior surveyor and possible rehousing. She thanked everyone for solidarity.

Alternative Burns Night success

Brent Kennedy
Carlisle Socialist Party

Some came by word of mouth. Others saw our posters, read the article in the local paper or heard the interview on BBC Radio Cumbria.

It was another successful and enjoyable Alternative Burns Night in Carlisle. This year was the best yet.

Over 60 people tucked into haggis, neeps and tatties - including a group of factory workers from over the border, who again honoured us Sassenachs by choosing this event for their work’s outing. They got £100 off their boss to go.

At the end, many went home with a copy of the Socialist or Socialism magazine.

Today to read more about the poet fighter for social justice.

As far back as 1809, “In Carlisle a call was made for an entertainment to which Burns himself could have come when at his poorest estate and a meeting was got up and conducted by working men.”

Just add the word ‘women’ and we’re proud to have revived that tradition.

Read ‘Robert Burns: of the people, for the people’ at socialistparty.org.uk

Socialist sellers

Leeds - A day in the life of a seller of the Socialist

I sold 13 copies of the Socialist across three campaign activities on 29 January.

This shows how important it is for Socialist sellers to always carry copies of the latest paper with them. That way you can keep an eye open for more opportunities to spread our ideas.

In the morning, we sold the Socialist outside the main council office. We started selling the Socialist there when the paper marked issue 1000 in 2018.

Sales go up and down depending on the mood and what’s on the front page, but also whether our regular buyers are working from home or on annual leave. Consistently selling here has helped the Socialist Party stay in contact with an important workforce in the city as well as union activists.

That evening we also heard about a rally for Rebecca Long-Bailey’s Labour leadership campaign. Outside the venue we sold papers to those attending the rally.

Another person, who was just passing, bought a paper. They’d already read one of our articles online. See ‘Protesting is not terrorism’ at socialistparty.org.uk.

Later at the trade union council, where Socialist Party members play a leading role, we sold a further five copies, including one to a shop steward we hadn’t earlier met in the day at the council office.

Four of these copies were also sold at solidarity price. If you buy the Socialist for £2 or more, you can help the Socialist Party to raise fighting fund to support our campaign activities.

Iain Dalton

Hackney, London: People agree: it’s a weak government that can be beaten by strikes

Most people in Hackney agreed that this isn’t a strong government.

When I mentioned about strike action to defend the NHS, everyone agreed.

Across two stalls we sold 19 Socialist papers and raised £24. A retired bus driver came back to buy the paper for the second week in a row.

Chris Newby
Liverpool council

“No more cuts” - Is Joe Anderson serious?

Roger Bannister
Liverpool and District Socialist Party

Joe Anderson, Liverpool’s elected mayor, has caused a publicity storm in the city by publicly announcing that he will refuse to make any more cuts at the behest of the Tory government.

Over the past decade Anderson has been happy enough to pass on cuts totalling £436 million, devastating services in the city, and plans another £30 million cuts in the budget currently being prepared for 2020-21.

However, having won the general election with an overall majority, the Tories have rejigged the funding formula for local government, ironically termed the “Fair Funding Review”. It’s directed at forcing further cuts on hard-hit urban areas, many of which were part of the “Brexit revolt” during the general election, returning Tory MPs for the first time. It appears that a further £27 million will be cut from Liverpool, and this has enraged Anderson.

However, examining his statements carefully, there is a wide gap between the headlines and the small print. In fact, on 31 January, Anderson was asked directly by Roger Phillips, the host of BBC Radio Merseyside’s weekday phone-in programme: “You are not going to be doing a Derek Hatton then?” (Derek was deputy leader of Liverpool’s socialist council in the mid-1980s) Anderson replied: “No, we are not going to be setting an illegal budget, I promise you.”

Anderson went on to say that the government would have to send people up to make the cuts themselves.

In other words, what Anderson is really doing is little more than empty sabre rattling, deliberately grabbing headlines in advance of the mayoral election in May, with no realistic intention of stopping the cuts.

This charade illustrates the need for a proper challenge to the Tory attacks on Liverpool. The city needs a Mayor who is prepared to use council reserves to balance a budget, working alongside the local authority trade unions, the Merseyside trade unions generally, and working-class people on the city’s housing estates, organising demonstrations, strikes and political pressure to force the necessary funding out of the Tory government.

Left Books, PO Box 1398, Enfield EN1 9GT

leftbooks.co.uk £13.50 including postage.
Card payments 020 8988 8789

[Image 666x371 to 734x470]

Cuts and community wellbeing

Jan Hunter
Derby Socialist Party

Over the past decade the massive austerity cuts to local government spending have saved the provision of local services and employment. Such cuts ruin people’s lives and their well-being and contribute to the decline of communities.

Statutory services that councils are obliged to provide have been pared to the bone, while non-statutory provision, which councils are not therefore obliged to fund, has been decimated.

One area of non-statutory provision is leisure facilities. A recent report from the Local Government Association (LGA) stated that “nearly two-thirds of leisure centres are in need of urgent investment” and are “...in desperate need of being upgraded and refurbished.”

The report goes on to claim that a quarter of all sports halls and swimming pools have not been refurbished in over 20 years. In the past decade leisure infrastructure has seen a reduction in central government funding by one-third.

The LGA has called on the government for £500 million to enable councils to re-design, upgrade and renovate facilities to the required standard to enable leisure and active communities and transform the nation’s health.

In 2022 the Commonwealth games take place in Birmingham. To help prepare for the post-games ‘legacy’, vital funds need to be provided now. Getting communities more active and using leisure facilities will help tackle child obesity, loneliness, and mental health issues.

The NHS spends hundreds of millions of pounds annually treating preventative diseases and illnesses. Much of this could be avoided with wider provision and access, at affordable cost, to better and well-staffed leisure facilities. Such investment would pay for itself by offsetting savings for the NHS from the increased benefits of improved health and well-being of citizens and communities, and, it can also contribute to meeting climate targets.
in the Middle East and West Asia. A report by the Syrian Center for Human Rights in June 2020 stated that at least 47,000 people had been killed in air strikes since the start of the conflict in 2011. In addition, tens of thousands have been displaced from their homes, and many more have been forced to flee the country.

The conflict has had a devastating impact on Syria's economy. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) shrank by 12% in 2011, and the inflation rate soared to 50%. With the closure of many businesses and the disruption of trade, many people have lost their jobs, and the cost of living has increased significantly. The currency, the Syrian pound, has also depreciated, further exacerbating the economic crisis.

The international community has been criticized for not doing enough to address the humanitarian situation in Syria. The United Nations Security Council has adopted several resolutions calling for an end to the violence, but these have been met with resistance from the Assad regime and its allies. The lack of a political solution to the conflict has meant that millions of Syrian refugees continue to live in limbo, with no end in sight to the crisis.

Key takeaways:
- The civil war in Syria has been marked by violence, displacement, and humanitarian crises.
- The international community has been criticized for not doing enough to address the humanitarian situation and for not pushing for a political solution.
- The Syrian conflict has had a severe impact on the country's economy, with GDP and currency value declining and the cost of living increasing.
- The crisis has forced millions of Syrian refugees to flee their homes, with no end in sight to the humanitarian situation.
Privatisation doesn’t work! That’s the real message from the Tories’ decision to take Britain’s worst train operator, Northern Rail, back into public ownership.

South Western could be next, and the list is getting longer all the time. This is on top of the failures of the East Coast Main Line and ScotRail, and the ‘bailout’ of Flybe.

The whole system is a total mess. Even Keith Williams, head of an ‘independent’ review into the rail franchise system, has said we need “revolution not evolution”.

We agree. But unlike Mr Williams, former chief executive of British Airways, we won’t be satisfied with a state ‘fat controller’ regulating more private franchises.

We want all the privateers out of the railways - and out of all of our public services.

We want an integrated and affordable transport system, fully funded and publicly owned, democratically controlled by transport workers and transport users - a system which puts the needs of working-class people and the environment before the profits of the super-rich.

See also pages 8, 9 and 10