Young people in UK speak in solidarity with protests across Europe: “The capitalist system is not viable for humans”

Our reporters
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Young people in Britain are watching the mass youth protests in France and across Europe, recognising in the demands of Gen Z demonstrators a common fight against austerity, war and genocide, and against the rise of the far-right.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with young people in London, Manchester, Bradford and Sheffield about building a working-class movement across Europe for socialism. Students shared their views on the protests and the political conclusions they are drawing.

At Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), **Esther**, who studies chemistry, said, “The protests are a normal response when people can’t do basic things because of lack of money. It’s understandable that things are on fire—lives are being vandalised. Whatever policies governments have, they are not sustainable. Some people are getting rich and so much money is spent on war. I’m against war.”

Esther, who is from Brazil, spoke about the train crash in Spain that killed 69 people, recalling a similar disaster in Brazil in 2015, “when mercury from a mine in Mariana polluted a river that ran all over Minas Gerals [a province with 21 million inhabitants].”

Esther agreed that students needed to turn to the working class, “It would be so much better if workers and students got together. We need a community so workers can stop production and still feed their kids. We have everything in the world for everyone to have a good life.”

Libby is doing an MA in Fashion marketing at MMU. She said of the protests, “It’s good because it makes people aware of the issues like the cost of living. I can’t afford anything nowadays. Job prospects are bleak, and fashion doesn’t get much funding. The Arts get low funding.”

“Immigrants are an easy scapegoat,” she continued, “Blaming everything on immigrants! And war is never worth it.” Asked about Labour Prime Minister Andy Burnham, she said, “I don’t really trust politicians; I’ve not had a good run of them in my lifetime. I’d like to think there is light at the end of the tunnel, but it’s getting harder.”

Koladi, who studies economics at MMU, stopped at the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) bookstall with his friend David, a finance and accounting student. He explained they were struggling to find work to cover basic living costs while at university: “I’ve been looking for a job for over a year, anything.”

David said it was hard to make ends meet: “The job market, inflation, no pay rises. You can work eight hours, four days a week and only get paid £400.”

“The end stage of capitalism is horrible,” added Koladi. Pointing to the threat of nuclear war, he said: “America has the largest military in the world. They could have free health care and education if they didn’t use the money on defence.”

Stuart, an army veteran, visited the bookstall with his family. Looking at our books, he responded, “I went to Iraq. I never saw any weapons of mass destruction.” He explained that it was while doing an Archaeology degree that “I discovered Karl Marx. Once I started reading Marx, it really opened my mind up. The solution [to austerity, war, and fascism] can only be found in globalised action.” He purchased, *In Defence of Leon Trotsky*, *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party (Britain)* and *Marxism versus Critical Race Theory*.

Manikandan, from India, works as a senior scientist in nuclear medicine. He expressed his solidarity with young people protesting in Europe and globally: “They are protesting because austerity puts a strain on the cost of living,” he said.

“There is underfunding for healthcare and education. I think the future under this system is unsustainable. There are so many indicators—healthcare, cost of living, climate change—that are essential for a normal person to live. I always want to be on the side of the people who are suffering.”

Speaking about the mass youth protests in India, Manikandan said, “In India, people have no rights. The system is corrupt. They took voting rights off the people, so you can’t change the government. People haven’t a common platform to fight, so a left-wing student movement organised and galvanised the protests.

“The unions should do this, but they backstab and side with the government, and say the government can make reforms, but that is short-term. They don’t resolve the fight for socialism. The capitalist system is outdated; it is not viable for humans.

“All the funds should be directed to education and healthcare, but this system is profit-based. I want what Lenin wanted, a social system without war or any army. The wars are happening where the oil is. It’s affecting us with increased energy bills. NATO agreed they wouldn’t go further East, but Estonia, Poland, Norway—they’re all in NATO. Imagine if Russia or China went to Ireland or Mexico; how would NATO react? War is in no one’s interest.

“As a professional, I am worried about economic uncertainty, economic meltdown, underfunding for research—they are cutting so many projects. I’m worried about the children’s future, how to get healthcare, layoffs. Without jobs, people end up in mass poverty.

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"Fascism is what is happening in India. There are 400 million in poverty in India, living on three dollars a day. Every country puts money into war. If anyone questions this, you are branded anti-national and put in jail. The same problems occur in India, in Michigan."

Seth, an unemployed youth from London, told the WSWS, "The youth are responding to conditions caused by corrupt government and their policies against education and welfare. Every day workers are subjected to worse treatment by corporations, and somehow every day it becomes harder for young people to find work. I see this mirrored in all countries.

"The French workers and youth have been driven to protest. I feel a strong sense of solidarity with them. What is happening in France means so much for the worldwide movement against the oligarchy and the war it causes. Other countries can and will follow in the French people's footsteps. I have found it impossible to find any work as a young person in London. The government could not care less."

Education was being cut "as most other welfare, to go toward bombs and bullets. The same is happening across Europe; everywhere is scrambling for military power.

"War scares me. London is the biggest city in the country and has the most people living in it, so it feels like it would be a priority target for bombing. Which is scary. British workers and French workers have everything in common; everyone does across the globe. The mission is a worldwide working-class movement after all."

Earlier this year, Seth attended a public meeting held by the Socialist Equality Party on the centenary of the British General Strike. He said, "Trade unions exist to make people feel like they have more support and more ways out than they do. In France the trade unions are delaying, trying their best to let the movement dissipate on its own. They would contain it. 100 years ago, in the British general strike, the trade unions gave up. The same thing is still happening."

Seth said that elections would not change the situation in France because "any current government will be a capitalist one. No matter what policies they have, they are still pro-austerity and pro-greed. Something fundamentally has to change the whole system. The people have the power. We have been taught for hundreds of years that we are each insignificant and just a drop of water, but the ocean is only made of drops."

Ruan, a sixth form student from Barnet in east London, whose family is from Brazil, said he supported the student revolt in France and the Gen Z protests in Germany, "Their fight is also my fight. I think every country with a working class that is suffering should do that.

"Firstly, the minimum wage, you know what? It is just for survival." He explained that rent is "£2,000 per month for one studio apartment, and then £100 is not even one week of groceries. You get injured? Your job isn't paying you. And then the educational system is awful, you know? Basically, if you're bad in school, they're going to put you in a worse class. It's like putting the addict in prison. Why aren't you putting him in rehabilitation? Putting him in prison isn't going to make him better. Every government is against their own people."

Ruan opposed the scapegoating of immigrants, "It reminds me of Hitler. The government here spends less than 1 percent on immigrants, and it spends so much on war. Then they blame society's problems on the immigrants. That's a tactic they've used for hundreds of years."

Asked for his views on Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France, and the hopes of many young people that he might change things, Ruan said, "I don't think electing a left government is enough. Voting won't help, especially in a continent filled with capitalist countries and countries that thrive on imperialism and colonisation. Maybe a revolution [can change things], but it's got to be organised.

"We have the power; we have potential as the working class. We're the strongest, but it's really complex. Basically, what I'm trying to say is that we, the working class, theoretically could, but we can't until we remove the police and the military. We've got to do it like Lenin, we've got to bring the workers with us."

Asked whether he thought it was possible to establish socialism, Ruan replied, "I think we can implement it in this world. It happened once; it can happen again. I think the chance is growing. 100 years ago, we brought socialism into the world. Maybe this century we bring it back, and you know, we bring communism in the next century."

Salem, 22, a student at Bradford College in West Yorkshire, said, "I think the protests by French students are about the colleges falling apart, and you can't really learn anything. I get my information from YouTubers who cover the protests, but I also have a friend in France.

"I haven't drawn a comparison before between what faces students in France and Britain, but I do feel a connection with French students because they are angry at the government, and I'm sure a lot of people are angry at this government.

"When I was in college recently, one of our supply teachers was teaching us completely the wrong thing. Most of our teachers are now supply teachers. Three years ago, I was in one of my classes, and there was a big hole in the floor where it had just collapsed. It was on the top floor of the college."

Asked for her thoughts on the Burnham Labour government, Salem said, "The government jumps far too quickly into America's or Israel's lap. They don't care about people in Britain; it has been like that with the last few governments."

Salem said that workers in Britain and the rest of Europe faced the same problems: "Their government doesn't care about them, and they would much rather workers starve than live. If they need to deploy the military just because some students are protesting, then they are clearly really leaning towards those in power. They would much rather spend resources against students protesting for a better life than provide a better life."

Asked what she thought about socialism, Salem said it meant, "No one should be higher than anyone else. Just equal, basically. In an ideal socialist world, from my point of view, there would be no rich people."

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