

## **Warning: known thieves operating in all areas**

# **Turn Carillion crisis into movement against privatisation and capitalism**

Outsourcing, PFI, privatisation, as in Carillion, is 'reverse socialism'. It is nothing other than a highly efficient wealth transfusion system. We need a movement to kick out these profiteers from public services with compensation only paid on the basis of proven need - and not to the fat cats.

Via disastrously inefficient provision of services, cuts to workers' pay and conditions and the public land grab, outsourcing transfers both money and power from public services - that is in effect the working class, struggling middle class and youth, to the fat cat bosses.

The Carillion crisis proves the case for ending outsourcing completely and removing services, utilities and railways from the claws of the profiteers. This crisis needs to be used to make the case for democratic socialist planning of the economy. That means replacing the capitalist system, which has the pursuit of profit as its main aim, not meeting the needs of people. Carillion and the scandal of privatisation illustrates this.

As George Monbiot has pointed out in the Guardian, "PFI contracts specify that if there is a conflict between paying the private provider and delivering public services, the payments must come first... Money is officially more valuable than life."

The NHS funding crisis, creating so much pain and suffering, is made so much worse by the privatisation crisis. Companies such as Carillion, Interserve and Kier Group that have built NHS hospitals using PFI deals have made pre-tax profits of £831 million over the past six years.

The National Audit Office report is devastating - it shows that PFI deals demand that we hand over nearly £200 billion to contractors for at least 25 years. The cost of privately financing public projects can be 40% higher than keeping them in-house, ie under public ownership. Meanwhile jobs and services get slashed and austerity roams the land.

## **State looting**

A mountain of evidence existed prior to Carillion that proved the case against privatisation going back to [the Potters' Bar rail crash](#), collapsing schools, sky-rocketing bills, legion job losses, black-listing and so on. However, for decades both Tory and Blairite governments have pursued privatisation with vim and vigour, policies which in effect loot the state.

Why? Because they represent the capitalist class - the big business bosses, the bankers - and act in their interests. Privatisation was a miracle for the fat cats - it represented a source of rapid and almost guaranteed profits when the obvious fields of investment in production became less profitable as the post-war boom started to weaken. And they see it as a route to reduce the welfare state and public services meaning that, like Trump intends, the richest pay even less corporation and income tax.

In 2013 a YouGov poll found that 84% thought that the NHS should be run in the public sector, and support for the renationalisation of energy companies, the Royal Mail and the railway companies reached 68%, 67% and 66% respectively. The election of Jeremy Corbyn to Labour's leadership and the support for his anti-austerity manifesto last June were expressions of this opposition. In fact support for renationalisation has grown to 80% now supporting taking rail and utilities back in house.

Fear of the Carillion crisis turning this support into a movement against privatisation and of it drawing more far-reaching anti-capitalist and socialist conclusions has spread panic among the defenders of capitalism and has them arguing that action is needed - but action that does not threaten their system.

Unsurprisingly this is clearly expressed in the house journals of capitalism - the Financial Times and the Economist. The Financial Times' concern is that "the real political battle is over whether the private sector should be running public services at all."

It argues that the problem is not with outsourcing per se and the government needs to "do far more to demonstrate that private profits are a legitimate reward for better services if it is to win round a sceptical public." Cue Theresa May weighing in to threaten punishment for bad bosses in the hope that this will mean privatisation and marketisation of everything from children's services to elderly care can continue.

Defenders of capitalism also exist inside the Labour Party. Anti-Corbyn Labour MP Stella Creasy has entered the debate saying Carillion is like a "legal loan shark" and outsourcing is like "using a payday loan to build a school". While her similes appear strong they cannot mask the weakness of her solution - a windfall tax on outsourcing companies.

Socialists argue that the rich should be the ones who pay for the economic crisis, and we support dramatically increased taxes, not for the working and middle classes, but for the tiny elite at the top of society. But we also recognise that the 'markets' - that is capitalism - will never meekly accept dramatically increased taxation and regulation.

Big corporations already refuse to pay the levels of taxation agreed. Any measure that does not end the privatisation of services will not solve the problems created by it.

A windfall tax also does nothing to address the democratic issues - of private companies having control over public resources and services. Academisation has the effect of transferring billions of pounds worth of publicly funded assets in the form of school buildings and land into the hands of private sponsors who are able to set their own pay, conditions and working time arrangements for newly appointed teachers.

Polly Toynbee writing in the Guardian gives many examples of the "zero flexibility" allowed councils in these contracts. So it is enormously welcome to hear Jeremy Corbyn say that a Labour government "will re-write the rules to give the public back control of their services... if these are public contracts then we should be the manager and not have a middle man like Carillion creaming off the profits."

Toynbee then asks "where is the border between sensible and senseless private involvement in public services?" "No one expects the NHS to manufacture beds or drugs," she argues. Certainly we call for cancelling all NHS Private Finance Initiative (PFI) payments which would save £2 billion a year and should be a major demand of the 3 February demo.

But so should a movement fighting for the NHS call for the nationalising the pharmaceutical industry which could save £3 billion a year of profits, and enable research to be done to meet patients' - not shareholders' - needs. And that is what is crucial here.

Jeremy Corbyn told May at PMQs that "these corporations need to be shown the door. We need our public services provided by public employees with a public service ethos and a strong public oversight".

The Carillion crisis has revealed both the need for a struggle to end privatisation and the profit system, and the battle that will be fought by the defenders of the capitalist system. To counter this, the workers' movement would need to organise active support for nationalisation.

That means taking a cue from the RMT transport union which has stood firm on rail nationalisation and against all moves towards privatisation. It also means a battle in the Labour Party to remove the Blairites.

This includes in the councils. Faced with 40-50% cuts in local government funding Labour councils have opted to hand services over to private companies hand over fist. Where cuts-making councillors can't be reelected by opponents of austerity and privatisation, they can be challenged in the May elections.

And it means building the fight for socialist nationalisation which would be based on popular democratic control involving service workers, trade unions and users.

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# Welsh NHS crisis - we cannot go on like this

**Dave Reid, Socialist Party Wales**

We cannot go on like this. That is the substance of a letter from A&E consultants to the Welsh government to draw attention to the huge crisis in Welsh hospitals this winter.

"We have neither sufficient staff nor sufficient beds (in either acute hospitals or the community) to cope with the needs of an ageing population.

"We're on our knees as far as emergency care [is concerned]. There's good evidence that if patients are seen in emergency departments which are crowded, that are full, their treatment is delayed.

"That can actually cause an increase in the length of stay, it can make their illness more severe and in some cases it can cause death, so for safety and patient care we're very, very worried."

While the NHS in England is run by the Tories, the NHS in Wales is run by Welsh Labour. The two things that the health service in both countries have in common is that there are huge crises in hospital provision this winter and they are both chronically under-resourced.

The Welsh government's response to critics is essentially the same as the Tory Westminster government's response - they laughably claim they prepared for the extra demands imposed by the winter health crisis and they have apologised to patients for cancelled operations.

The Welsh ministers should also apologise to NHS staff who have worked way beyond their contracted hours to try and keep up with the increase in demands on the NHS and have been rewarded with years of real pay cuts and cuts in pensions.

The Tory UK government is mainly responsible for the underfunding of the Welsh NHS but Welsh Labour bears some responsibility too. They have implemented the Tory spending cuts with scarcely a whimper of protest, cutting the Welsh NHS spending even deeper than the Tories in England until 2014.

## Health needs

A socialist government would not meekly accept the cuts. It would set a budget that matched the health needs of working class people in Wales and fight the Tories in Westminster with every weapon at its disposal to fund it.

Instead the Welsh Labour government has concurred with the cuts and reorganised the Welsh NHS to match the limits demanded by a capitalist elite who insist that public services must be curtailed to pay for the economic crisis.

Welsh Labour's approach is closer to Tony Blair's than Jeremy Corbyn's. They have defied mass protests and demonstrations.

The South Wales Programme is reducing A&E provision down to just five for the whole population of South Wales. Many emergency patients in mid-Wales have to travel long distances to English hospitals because there are no A&E departments in the region. In North Wales there are just three A&E departments.

## Socialist Party Wales demands:

- End the NHS crisis - reverse the cuts
- Re-open closed A&E departments

- Increase the number of ambulances and paramedics to provide an adequate ambulance service
  - Implement an emergency medical student training programme to train new doctors and nurses
  - Provide free medical education for medical students who stay to work in Wales
  - Return the student nurse bursary scheme
  - End the 1% pay cap! National coordinated industrial action to win 5%
  - Fight for sufficient funding to provide decent healthcare and prepare for an ageing population
  - The Welsh government sets a needs budget and campaign to force this weak Tory government to increase funding
  - Support the 3 February demo for the NHS in London called by Health Campaigns Together
  - Read more at [socialistpartywales.org.uk](http://socialistpartywales.org.uk)
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## £2m to remove Grenfell-type cladding: residents to get bill

### No charges to residents! Cladding off now!

**Helen O'Connor, Lambeth and South West London Socialist Party**

Residents in the 'Citiscap' housing complex in Croydon, south London, have learnt that tests revealed the cladding on their block poses the same fire hazard as Grenfell Tower.

Disgracefully, the landlord, Proxima GR Properties, refuses to pay a penny to remove it. The firm instead demands residents pay the £2 million pound bill - costing leaseholders £31,300 a flat, more than many workers earn in a year.

The landlord is so determined to absolve itself of health and safety obligations that this dispute will be heard at a property tribunal in February. Meanwhile, Proxima GR has stated its intention to charge leaseholders for fire warden patrols!

While residents face the stark possibility of being made bankrupt and homeless, Vincent Tchenguiz, one of the multimillionaire moguls behind Proxima, recently purchased a 165-foot superyacht.

### Developers

Croydon has become the new 'get rich quick' town as property developers build hundreds of overpriced, cheaply constructed flats. In November the Croydon Advertiser reported that Inspired Homes has converted Impact House into 200 'micro-flats' being sold for £324,950 each.

Residents at Citiscap are right to raise concerns. The Grenfell Tower fire was not a one-off.

In November 2017 there were fires in blocks in Manchester and Newcastle. Thanks to brave fire crews all residents were safely evacuated.

There was a further fire in December 2017 on the Seymour Hill estate near Belfast. And earlier this month the firefighter in charge of putting out Nottingham railway station said sprinklers would have stopped the fire developing.

This situation is shocking and unacceptable. Big landlords and councils have the financial capacity to ensure all tenants and leaseholders are safe. Residents can organise to demand this. The Socialist Party says:

- No charges to residents! Landlords and councils must use their reserves to pay for all safety measures immediately and in full, and bill the government if necessary
- Stop waiting for test results or service charges - cladding off now, before there are further tragedies
- Immediately install sprinkler systems in all multi-storey accommodation

- 24-hour fire patrols - and immediate temporary or permanent rehousing if residents prefer - where there is any delay
  - No safety, no rent! Residents can organise to campaign for their demands, including withholding rent and service charges if necessary. [Read more: how working class communities can organise to fight for safety - justice for Grenfell and safety for all!](#)
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## **100,000 stuck on ambulances**

## **33,000 nurses quit health service**

# **Private profit out of our NHS**

**Bea Gardner, Southampton Socialist Party**

Many of us are terrified of coming down with one of the many viruses hitting Britain this winter. Or there is a sense of dread at the possibility of joining the people in queues of ambulances outside A&E departments - over 100,000 already this winter.

Once inside, hospitals are dangerously understaffed by overworked health workers. This has contributed to a crisis in staff recruitment and retention. 33,000 nurses left the profession last year, escaping stress and low pay. For the first time, more left the NHS than joined it.

Scandalously, the NHS is forced to give billions to private profiteers before a single penny is spent meeting the basic health needs of the population.

## **Carillion**

Companies such as Carillion have been raking it in from overpriced and unaffordable 'private finance initiative' (PFI) contracts. There are more than 100 PFI hospitals in the UK, for which the NHS has committed just under £80 billion.

The original cost of building these hospitals was just £11.5 billion. Even accounting for the cost of running services included in the contracts, this amounts to an enormous waste.

Last year, the Centre for Health and the Public Interest found some PFI firms had profit margins of over 30%. And the National Audit Office has now found one PFI hospital cost 70% more than if the project had been built direct by the government.

It is clear the NHS needs to be freed from the shackles of this debt. Jeremy Corbyn has denounced the "outsource-first racket" and pledged to bring PFI contracts back in-house.

The Labour leadership should be raising this demand at every opportunity. But to achieve it, this must be linked to cancelling the PFI debt - and nationalising the banks and top corporations which control the economy, including many privatisation projects.

Millions would respond if Corbyn and the unions called them onto the streets as part of a determined strategy to save the NHS. Corbyn has the opportunity to do this ahead of the NHS demo in London scheduled for 3 February.

Such a demonstration, if coupled to a programme for struggle from the unions, could set off a wave of action across the NHS. The junior doctors' struggle of 2016 got enormous public support. It would get even more now, two years on.

This is what we need if the NHS crisis is to be solved. An end to the Tories, and a Corbyn-led government under mass pressure to stick to its guns. Not a penny more for the PFI vultures raking in the money that should be funding our NHS!

## **March to save our NHS**

- Saturday 3 February
  - London protest: 12pm at Gower Street, WC1E
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# **Leeds playing fields rescued from Blairites**

**Tanis Belsham-Wray, Leeds Socialist Party**

Labour-run Leeds City Council appears to have finally retreated in the face of mass community opposition to the plans to build on Fearnville playing fields [previously reported in the Socialist](#).

This follows over 2,000 signatures on a petition, 4,000 leaflets delivered, and 69% opposition to the consultation.

Over 70 residents and local activists gathered in east Leeds on 19 January to plan opposition to building a 'free school' on the fields.

At this meeting, Richard Burgon, the local Corbynista Labour MP, announced a statement from Councillor Lisa Mulherin, the council executive member overseeing the development. She had recommended that "we do not progress the proposals consulted on recently to develop a school on Fearnville fields."

This victory is down to the resistance of local residents, organised by the Save Fearnville Fields campaign, which includes local Socialist Party members. Labour councillors present at the meeting attempted to rewrite history, claiming to have been against the proposals from the start.

## **Campaign**

However, the only councillor who publicly opposed the plans before this statement was ex-Labour councillor Catherine Dobson, now of the East Leeds Independents, who has been part of the campaign from the beginning. Richard Burgon also criticised the proposals from early in the campaign.

This shows that local residents, by building a campaign and putting pressure on councillors, can win.

However, the campaign will remain vigilant until this proposal has been voted down at the council executive meeting and no further proposals to build on the fields are put forward.

We will also be continuing to pressure the council to fund improvements to the nearby leisure centre which was consulted on alongside the school.

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# **May's "war on plastic" still puts profits before the planet**

**Simon Carter, East London Socialist Party**

A rapidly growing mountain of plastic waste is polluting the world's land and oceans.

Over 300 million tonnes of it is produced each year globally, according to Statista - roughly the equivalent weight of humankind. But a study in Science Advances found only 9% is recycled and 12% incinerated. The rest ends up dumped in the seas affecting the marine food chain, or goes into landfill.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation estimates that by 2050 the oceans will contain more plastic by weight than fish! In 2016 researchers at Plymouth University reported that plastic was found in a third of UK-caught fish.

The mountainous volume of used plastic in Britain has been compounded by the Chinese government's decision to ban imports of plastic waste since 1 January.

This means 500,000 tonnes a year of toxic plastic could end up incinerated or as landfill as Britain's recycling industry doesn't have sufficient capacity.

Faced with this massive environmental crisis, Prime Minister Theresa May has pledged to abolish plastic waste such as carrier bags and food packaging. But not until 2042 - by which time global plastic production is on course to have doubled or tripled.

Even mild measures such as a plastic bottle return-deposit scheme have not been included in the government's plan.

Like their policy to tackle deadly levels of air pollution, Tory environmental measures are pathetically inadequate and come too late.

Apart from extending the 5p charge on plastic shopping bags to small retailers in England, and asking supermarkets to provide plastic-free goods aisles, the government's message to their pals in big business amounts to 'carry on generating profits - and hang the environment'!

## **Manufacturing**

As far as the manufacturing and retail industries are concerned plastic is cheap and versatile. Coca-Cola alone produces over 100 billion throwaway plastic bottles every year, according to Greenpeace.

The environmental charity also says the six top six drinks companies in the world use a combined average of just 6.6% of recycled plastic in their products.

Plastic drinking bottles could be made out of 100% recycled plastic, but that would mean the bottles wouldn't be clear and shiny - a marketing no-no.

Under the media spotlight, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and high street brands such as McDonald's and Iceland have all recently announced 'initiatives' to tackle plastic waste. The rub is their 'ambition' is voluntary - and decades away.

The technology to eliminate plastic waste in an environmentally friendly way exists. However, as long as capitalism and big business-friendly governments continue to set the political agenda then profit will come first.

Workers, as producers and consumers, must fight to secure tighter regulation of industry. But you can't control what you don't own. That is why public ownership and socialist planning represent the real green future.

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## **News in brief**

### **Segregated playground**

Children were divided into rich and poor playgrounds during lunchtime at an 'academy' primary school in the West Midlands.

Wednesbury Oak Academy in Tipton asked parents for £6 donations to fund new play equipment. The school then denied access to children whose parents hadn't paid.

After exposure by the Mirror, the school cancelled the policy. But this Ryanair approach to schooling, with state education dismembered into saleable packages, is in the profit-driven DNA of academies.

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## Oil spoils

Bosses can legally pay less than the minimum wage to workers doing dangerous jobs out in the North Sea.

Transport and maritime union RMT has found the latest government guidance on rates only extends 12 miles into British waters.

It seems staff decommissioning a BP oil rig received just \$45 for a 12-hour shift. That's about £2.70 an hour, working all day with heavy and flammable materials, over a freezing cold sea.

BP recorded profits of \$1.4 billion in just the first three months of last year.

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## Benefit cut beaten

Campaigners have beaten a government attack on disability benefits. 150,000 people will now receive more of the support they need.

The Tories had tried to change the rules around the 'personal independence payment' (PIP) to exclude some mental illness sufferers. PIP is itself an attack, replacing the superior 'disability living allowance' benefit.

After a successful legal challenge, the government considered appealing and emergency legislation to retain the brutal cut. But a statement on 19 January conceded defeat.

The climbdown follows persistent campaigning by disabled rights activists including the Socialist Party.

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## Vietnam War: 50 years since the Tet Offensive

**On 30 January 1968 the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the People's Army of Vietnam launched the Tet Offensive against US and allied troops in South Vietnam. On the 50th anniversary of this key stage in that war, we print edited extracts from 'Empire Defeated: Vietnam War, the lessons for today' by Peter Taaffe.**

A massive military offensive was first launched against the US by the NLF on the Marine Base at Khe Sanh, at the beginning of 1968. Two elite North Vietnamese divisions came south along the 'Ho Chi Minh trail' to join the southern guerrillas to make a force estimated at 80,000.

They faced 6,000 US troops who were besieged for 77 days. Undoubtedly, the Vietnamese had calibrated their attack to coincide with the beginning of an election year in the US.

The battle was linked to, and a prelude to, the much more intense and vital events around the Tet Offensive launched on 30 January 1968.

When it began, Khe Sanh, which was part of and merged into this general battle, produced great consternation in the US. General William Westmoreland, overall commander of the US forces, stated in his personal account later that 'tactical nuclear weapons' would have been considered to deter North Vietnamese forces in the event of the US facing imminent defeat.

There is a consistent threat of the use of the nuclear option in the policies of the US general staff, in 1954, in 1968, in Afghanistan at one stage, and it now forms an essential part of the military doctrine of US imperialism today.

The vulnerability of the US was graphically shown in Khe Sanh. The hand-to-hand combat between US troops and the Vietnamese was broadcast throughout the length and breadth of the US on TV.

Vietnam was the first war in which television played a key role. Because of its deleterious effect in shaping mass consciousness on the war and, therefore, on the interests of the ruling class, in future it went to great lengths to prevent a repetition.

Today, in the world of the internet, it is virtually impossible to prevent the truth about a war ultimately emerging. However, in the short term, 'management of the news' is a powerful weapon in shaping public opinion.

Witness the way that the Bush regime managed to convince the majority of the US population that Saddam and Iraq were instigators with al-Qaeda in the bombing of the Twin Towers.

Khe Sanh was besieged for ten days before the Tet Offensive began and its agony was played out alongside this catastrophe. The North Vietnamese generals conceived Khe Sanh as a massive diversionary tactic from the main goal.

The aim was to take the guerrilla struggle from the countryside into the towns, and stage simultaneous uprisings in the urban areas. But the guerrilla struggle was based largely on the peasantry, whereas the urban population, particularly the working class - at least in the big cities, more removed from the influence of the agricultural areas - had a different consciousness.

The North Vietnamese regime, which by the time of the Tet Offensive had been in power for 12 years, was the NLF guerrillas' model for the kind of society they would construct in the south.

However, the working class was not directly the dominant ruling political power in the north, nor did democratic organisations, like the soviets in the early part of the Russian revolution, exist as organs of this power. Therefore, the South Vietnamese working class, in the main, was not attracted to this model.

Nevertheless, given the sense of national humiliation which existed at the growing US occupation, the hatred for the acolytes of US imperialism and the fact that the urban population was connected to the villages through family, the guerrillas undoubtedly met with a sympathetic attitude from significant sections of the urban population.

The Tet Offensive was not 'militarily successful', in the sense that the guerrillas did not hold the towns which they initially took. Nevertheless, it was a devastating psychological blow to the US, and effectively marked the beginning of the end of US and imperialist power in Vietnam.

## **Blow to imperialism**

America's 'venerable newscaster' Walter Cronkite commented in the middle of the battle: "What the hell is going on? I thought we were winning this war."

The Tet Offensive - a coordinated uprising in 100 cities throughout the country - was at one and the same time a military defeat for the NLF and a crushing blow to US imperialism, from which it never really recovered.

The US, which was peddling the myth on the eve of the Tet Offensive that the war was almost won, was absolutely stunned initially by the ferocity of the guerrillas' onslaught.

An estimated 4,000 guerrillas barricaded themselves in the central, heavily populated areas of Saigon, as others attacked the main airport. The military headquarters and the presidential palace, as well as the US embassy, came under fire.

The fact that the guerrillas had penetrated into the very heart of US power, the US embassy in Saigon, had an electrifying effect throughout the world and particularly in the US.

At the siege of Khe Sanh before Tet had begun, Cronkite who, up to then, had supported the Johnson administration - in a rare personal report, called the war "a stalemate" and said that negotiations were the way out. Johnson reputedly said to his press secretary: "If I've lost Walter, I've lost Mr Average Citizen."

Some 80,000 Vietnamese troops were committed to the first wave of attacks during the Tet Offensive, the great majority of them southern guerrillas who knew every urban street.

Within a day US forces were in action, sometimes fighting block by block in parts of Saigon. US fighter planes were called in to bomb and strafe guerrillas located in densely-populated areas.

Nearby towns, believed to be occupied by guerrilla forces, were levelled. After this happened in one town, Ben Tre, an American officer stated: "We had to destroy it to save it."

Soon, US representatives, led by Johnson and Westmoreland, were claiming a quick and easy victory. But these claims were totally undermined by the character of the struggle which ensued.

For instance, in Hué the battle lasted for almost a month. Forced to fight street by street, the town was "devastated", in the words of one American commanding officer. "The Vietnamese 'small wooden' homes had been 'completely blown away'; the business district was 'rubble all over.'" In Hué alone 5,800 civilians died, ten times the combined American and South Vietnamese troop losses.

Overall the US claimed that there were "37,000 enemy dead" but the Tet Offensive had also cost the lives of 2,500 Americans troops and left half a million refugees in its wake.

A colossal debate now took place at every level of US society, with an open questioning as to how such an offensive could be launched, in alleged US strongholds in the urban areas, and with half a million troops present in the country to prevent such a situation.

The guerrillas had also suffered a defeat, which meant that, in some areas, they never recovered fully until the US was eventually evicted. Nevertheless, the Tet Offensive had a dramatic effect, giving a fillip to anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist forces worldwide.

A split now developed within the ranks of the US ruling class. The generals, led by Westmoreland, pressed for even greater military efforts to defeat the 'Viet Cong' while others pressed for a 'negotiated settlement'.

This resulted in the sending of a further 10,000 troops to Vietnam. By this time, US combat deaths in Vietnam were near to 19,000, with 115,000 wounded - 40% of the eventual overall toll. South Vietnamese deaths were 57,000 - one-fifth of what they would become.

## **Anti-war movement**

Bolstered by the growing anti-war movement, Bobby Kennedy announced in March 1968 he was going to try to challenge Johnson for the Democratic Party nomination for the presidency. The day after Kennedy announced his decision, 139 members of the House of Representatives - including 41 Democrats - passed a resolution calling for an immediate review by Congress of US war policy.

At the same time, the US military was clamouring for a massive increase in troop deployment, with Westmoreland suggesting an extra 206,000 troops should be sent to Vietnam. The main advice Johnson received was that he should not increase the number of troops but at the same time he should not negotiate.

Caught on the horns of a dilemma, besieged in Vietnam and also in his own backyard, Johnson soon announced that he would not stand again for the presidency. The Tet Offensive had gained a huge scalp, Johnson's, and had changed forever the course of the war.

But the greatest pressure for a US withdrawal came not from the summits of US society, Congress, but from the grassroots, the mass million-fold movement that was demanding an end to the war.

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## Debates on the left

The mass left student movement, in particular, was given a boost by the Tet Offensive. However, some of the leaders of this movement drew entirely the wrong conclusions from the experience of the guerrillas in Vietnam and how this could be applied to the struggles of workers and youth in the industrialised countries.

In effect, they had totally discounted the fighting capacity, the revolutionary potential, of the working class in Europe, the USA and Japan, in the 'metropolitan' centres of world capitalism. They were therefore unprepared for the earth-shaking events which were about to take place in Europe, where the role of the working class would be dramatically underlined.

Militant (predecessor of the Socialist Party) gave support to the struggles in the colonial world, including guerrilla movements. At the same time, we emphasised the role of the working class as the main agency for socialist change.

We argued these points, for example, at a meeting in Caxton Hall, London, in April 1968 organised by the 'United Secretariat of the Fourth International' (USFI).

Just a few months after Tet, ten million workers in France came out in the greatest general strike in history and occupied the factories for almost a month.

Ho Chi Minh's regime was modelled on that of Stalinism - elements of a planned economy but with state power and political control exercised by a bureaucratic elite through the 'Communist' Party.

We opposed Stalinist totalitarianism and called for workers' democracy. To clearly recognise the political character of North Vietnam did not in any way diminish the effect of campaigning for the victory of the Vietnamese revolution and specifically around the slogan: "Withdraw all US troops, let the Vietnamese decide."

The Vietnamese revolution, we said, would be enormously progressive when it finally evicted the US from the country. Isolated to one country, however, and a largely economically underdeveloped one at that, the political character of this regime could not be 'socialist' but would have many of the aspects of the regimes of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The task of Marxists at all times is to seek to raise the overall level of understanding of the working class and this involves calling things by their right name. It is entirely wrong to dignify regimes which are a caricature of 'socialism' - which by its nature is democratic and liberating - with false labels.

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## Lecturers vote yes to national strikes against pension cuts

**Sam Morecroft, Sheffield UCU anti-casualisation officer**

88% of University and College Union (UCU) members in 68 universities have voted for national strikes on a 58% turnout.

Universities UK is proposing to scrap the 'defined benefit' element of our pensions. This will reduce the value of staff pensions by 50% or more, and leave an average lecturer £200,000 worse off in retirement.

This is the highest turnout for a national ballot in the history of UCU, showing the anger at the scale of the attack. Many branches worked hard to build this, giving us a strong mandate for action.

At the time of writing there are further negotiations scheduled, beginning on 23 January.

But if there is no change in the employer's plans, UCU has announced a sustained, escalating programme of 14 days of strike action. This will begin with a two-day stoppage on or around 22 February, alongside action short of strike like working to contract.

61 of the universities balloted secured turnouts above 50%. The seven other institutions which voted for action but didn't secure the threshold required by the latest anti-union law will now be quickly re-balloted in light of the national result.

On all affected campuses, and on those not affected, meetings of workers and students must be held to begin to build solidarity for the strikes. This attack on our pensions is part of the marketisation and privatisation strategy of the Tory government. Unite to defend pensions and education!

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## **PCS executive agrees next steps in pay campaign following historic vote for action**

**Marion Lloyd, PCS national executive committee member and PCS Left Unity chair (personal capacity)**

On 31 January PCS members from across the UK civil service will participate in pay day protests over public sector pay restraint which has seen a 20% cut in wages since 2010. These protests come on the back of our fantastic consultative ballot result, where 98% of members voted for action on pay.

The PCS national executive committee (NEC), in which Socialist Party members play a key role, has agreed a number of actions to take our pay strategy forward.

A national pay claim has gone to the cabinet office calling for a minimum 5% increase or £1,200 for all, a wage of at least £10 an hour, and a return to national pay bargaining in the civil service. We want to establish a common pay structure which eliminates inequalities that exist across pay structures as a result of delegated bargaining, introduced by Thatcher to undermine the power of civil service trade unions and lower conditions of workers.

Our leading lay representatives and negotiators will meet in February to discuss and agree plans to build support, to prepare the ground for a statutory national ballot of all our members and to endorse the aims and objectives of our national pay claim.

Activity around the 13 March spring budget statement is also being looked at, including the possibility of a mass lobby of parliament, and we will be mobilising our members to attend the 12 May TUC demonstration in London.

PCS has been at the forefront of resisting austerity and campaigning against the pay cap. Socialist Party members in PCS will continue to develop links with trade unionists in other unions to help build the pressure from below to put pressure on the other public sector unions to take coordinated action on pay.

We welcome the decision by the Unite local government sector to recommend rejection of the pay offer in a consultative ballot. As we go to press, it appears Unison has voted to do the same.

A joint coordinated strategy for action could defeat the pay cap and help get rid of the Tories. The TUC must act now, pulling together all public sector unions in a coalition of the willing to plan out a strategy for action, coordinating existing and future pay disputes.

Young workers fighting for £10 an hour and an end to zero-hour contracts are beginning to get organised, seen by [the fantastic victory of McDonald's workers](#). The movement has an opportunity to mobilise on a mass scale, in the process empowering millions of young people alongside already organised workers.

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# Brum care workers protest council attacks

Lily Branchett, Birmingham Central Socialist Party

Pickers and their supporters demonstrated outside Birmingham council house on 20 January. Socialist Party and Socialist Students members joined over 100 people gathered at Victoria square to stand up to the latest council attacks against the homecare workers.

They include redundancies and ridiculous shift changes that make workers lives more difficult, make the job unsustainable for many, and are therefore detrimental to the service users as well. There were many different trade union speakers, with one woman saying how the homecare workers did not want redundancies, that they loved their job and the care they provided, however they demand fair pay and more practical and sociable working hours.

The speakers were followed by a short march around the city centre. When speaking to Unison stewards and striking homecarers, many expressed how happy they were to see so much student support.

There were calls for a 'people's budget' and for Labour councils to finally reflect the Labour leadership that gained so much support from workers and students at the last general election, and to stand up to brutal Tory austerity.

It's time for the council to put words into action and to defend our public services and workers. The victory of the city's bin workers is fresh in people's minds.

Our support and general anti-austerity message was well received and there was a positive and passionate vibe from strikers and supporters. All agree it's time for our second city to stand up to the Labour council which refuses to stand up for us!

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## Amy Murphy Usdaw campaign meeting

Reps and activists from five Usdaw branches came to a public meeting in Leeds held to promote the election campaign of Broad Left candidate for Usdaw president, and Socialist Party member, [Amy Murphy](#) on 17 January.

Amy has been visiting workplaces and speaking at branches across the country during the union's presidential and executive council elections, receiving a great response.

This carried through to the meeting where conditions in a number of Usdaw organised workplaces were discussed. And the meeting took place before it was announced that Tesco is planning to cut 1,700 shopfloor workers.

Attendees agreed the union needs a culture change, to one that actively challenges the attacks of company management on our members from one that seems to just accept management diktats. Electing an executive council and president that are prepared to challenge the status quo is the first step to doing this.

Several new members signed up to the Broad Left following the meeting.

Iain Dalton, Usdaw Leeds Private Trades branch vice chair

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## Ballots against Bromley privatisers

Controversial outsourcing Bromley council faces strike action by workers at two of its contractors that could hit libraries and care services.

The ballots for strike action are by 36 workers at 14 libraries employed by Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) and 20 care workers working for Certitude Support.

The ballots come as the whole question of the outsourcing of public services is being put under the microscope, following the Carillion debacle.

Unite regional officer Onay Kasab said: "Tory-controlled Bromley council has been a major cheerleader for the privatisation of public services, but GLL and Certitude Support have failed, hence the two strike ballots.

"The GLL ballot is about staffing, pay and time off for union duties. Staff are at breaking point and GLL has stated that posts will be cut. We have asked for numbers of those earmarked for redundancy, which it has not yet provided.

"Certitude has refused to recognise the union or to discuss pay. In addition, staff have persistently raised maintenance issues with serious health and safety implications.

The Certitude ballot runs from 25 January to 12 February and voting on action at GLL opens on 26 January, closing on 13 February.

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## **Ferrybridge: Workers down tools over unpaid wages**

### **Yorkshire Socialist Party**

Construction workers on the Ferrybridge multi-fuel project in West Yorkshire stopped work on 12 January because workers' reported that wages had not been paid into their bank accounts.

The firm which holds part of the contract on the job - Mostostal Zabrze - is a Polish company and the workforce is made up of around 50% British workers and 50% Polish workers.

Since before Christmas the main topic of conversation on the job every Thursday has been "are we getting paid".

On 12 January Polish and British workers stayed in the cabin when they were told that the Polish workers had not been paid their monthly wages and were now into their sixth week without pay.

Keith Gibson, GMB union rep, proposed that all workers sit in the cabin until wages are paid.

At the same time as Carillion has gone into liquidation, at Ferrybridge there is now this dispute.

After the meeting many of the Polish workers who had not joined the union were queuing up to join.

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## **Israel/Palestine**

# Punishment of Tamimi family awakens wave of international solidarity

Neta Most, Socialist Struggle/Nidal Ishtiraki (CWI in Israel/Palestine)

Sixteen-year-old Ahed Tamimi and her 21-year-old cousin, Nur Tamimi, were arrested during a military raid on their house in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh on the night of 19 December. Ahed remains in detention, having been denied bail, awaiting trial before an Israeli military court.

Ahed's mother, Neriman Tamimi, was arrested when she went into the police station to find out what happened to her daughter. The family's laptops and phones were confiscated by the army.

All of this was a result of video footage showing the two young women with their bare hands trying to remove from their home two armed soldiers wearing full body armour. Minutes earlier, Ahed's relative, 15-year-old Muhammad Tamimi, was critically wounded after he was shot in the head with a rubber plated metal bullet.

It is clear from the clip that the soldiers were not hurt or threatened at any point. They held on to their weapons, but left without arresting the women or attacking them.

The publication of the incident caused uproar among the Israeli right-wing. From the fascist far-right of Benzi Gupstein and "The Shadow" (a washed up rapper turned into a vocal proponent of the far-right on social media), to the security minister, Lieberman, and the education minister Bennet, who demanded the arrest of the girl who dared to kick a soldier out of her home in the occupied territories.

The highly covered arrests that were publicised by an Israeli army spokesperson seem like a vindictive act. It attempted to show that the soldiers retreating from protests of unarmed residents was nothing more than a tactical move.

It was also aimed at deterring young Palestinian men and women from fighting against the occupation, especially in the light of the widespread protests following Donald Trump's incendiary declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

The military is accusing Ahed of five counts of "assault" against security forces and incitement. Her mother is accused of filming two instances and of "incitement" on social media. Nur was also officially accused of an alleged assault of a soldier.

Meanwhile, the women of the Tamimi family are being held in the Ofer military prison - notorious for the use of questionable methods to break prisoners, such as isolation and sleep deprivation (Nur has since been released after 16 days incarceration).

They will stand trial in a military court, a court with almost a 100% conviction rate. Not only do they not have any chance of a fair trial, but there is a real danger they will remain in prison for years.

Jewish settlers who have been documented assaulting Palestinians, Israeli left activists, or even police and soldiers, almost never face any court for their actions.

## Media coverage

The picture drawn in the mainstream Israeli media was of a soldier innocently standing by, while two young girls are trying to confront him and cause him to react violently in front of the camera. But when looking at the facts it is clear the story is the other way around: the army was the one who provocatively entered the village to push the residents into a reaction to justify heavier oppression.

Several editorials went further and portrayed 16-year-old Ahed as a provocateur or a skilled actress who intentionally created situations to make Israeli Defence Forces soldiers "look bad" in front of cameras. As if

the Tamimi family invited armed soldiers to invade their home just so they would look bad, and as if there is a girl anywhere in the world who would choose to be born and live under a foreign occupation by a foreign army!

Since Trump's provocative declaration of Jerusalem being Israel's capital, at least 610 Palestinians have been arrested by the Israeli army. Over 170 of them are children and teenagers. Did all of them "orchestrate" their arrests just to make the soldiers look bad?

Most media outlets in Israel ignored the main issue: what was the reason the soldiers entered Nabi Saleh in the first place?

Only a handful of journalists mentioned the popular protests in the village - the ones the soldiers were there to repress - against the occupation and the theft of the village well by the adjacent Halamish settlement.

The water from the well, which lies on private Palestinian land, is used by the Palestinian farmers of Nabi Saleh, and the settlers taking it over prevents them from working their land. The Israeli army is there to protect the theft and to prevent residents from protesting against the injustice.

On the day of the filmed incident where Ahed and her cousin confront the soldiers, the army did not stop at suppressing the demonstrations by the well, but invaded the village in order to make it clear to the residents that protesting will not be worthwhile. This was when Muhammad Tamimi was shot in the head.

## **Solidarity and struggle**

Ironically, the brutal and arbitrary arrests of the Tamimi women sparked the solidarity that the government and army had feared when the video went viral. Workers and young people all over the world are following the arrest of the girl, with demonstrations demanding her release held in different countries.

This reaction reveals the limitations of power of the occupation regime when facing the civilian population and can definitely push more young people to rise up against it. "Ahed is a representative of a new generation of our people, of young freedom fighters... They must become the lifeline which will revive our revolution", her father Ahed Tamimi wrote in a public letter.

The arrest of the Tamimi daughters is meant to put a 'price tag' on resistance to the military regime in the occupied territories.

Netanyahu's government of settlements and big capital is arrogantly trying to break the resistance to the occupation using deadly oppression, and is trying to 'manage the conflict' at the expense of the future of Palestinian workers and youth, but also of Israelis.

There needs to be an end to the government's attacks, not the arrest of young Palestinian girls rising up against them. A fight to remove the army and the settlements from the occupied territories is a fight for peace.

Yes to protest and solidarity demonstrations demanding the Tamimis release.

End arbitrary arrests and incarceration without trial. End administrative detentions. Protect the right of each prisoner for legal representation, to know the charges against them and for a fair trial.

Get the military out of the occupied territories! End the occupation of the Palestinian territories. End the settlements.

Release all Palestinian political prisoners. A fair trial, in a designated procedure, supervised by independent workers' and human rights organisations from both sides of the conflict, for Israelis and Palestinians suspected of responsibility for horrors related to the conflict.

Yes to an independent, democratic and socialist Palestinian state, with its capital in eastern Jerusalem, alongside a democratic, socialist Israel, with genuine equality of minorities, as part of the struggle for a socialist Middle East and regional peace.

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# Defend Louise Harrison - save Yorkshire women's services!

Amy Cousens, Women's Lives Matter campaign and Leeds Socialist Party

Louise Harrison, now ex-staff member of South Yorkshire Women's Aid, was dismissed from her job on 19 January by a trustee vote of three to one not to renew her contract.

This comes after a campaign to save South Yorkshire Women's Aid, spearheaded by Louise at the beginning of September, when staff and volunteers were told there would be [no funding for the service from Doncaster Labour council](#).

This is not unique - these services are disappearing from our towns and cities because of the Tories implementing austerity and Labour councils enforcing it.

The campaign from the beginning has called out Doncaster Labour council for implementing Tory austerity. We urged them to find alternatives like using their £91 million of useable reserves. Instead Doncaster council has gone out of its way to excuse austerity and has branded the campaign trouble makers.

Continuously, myself as a volunteer, and Louise as a staff member were put under pressure by the trustees of the Women's Aid, who are also Labour members to not speak against the council.

That's when Louise received a letter just before Christmas warning her that her contract may not be renewed. This was political.

The 'Women's Lives Matter' campaign is a problem for the council's narrative of 'waiting out the storm' until a Labour government is elected. Our slogan is 'women cannot wait' - every week over two women die directly as a result of domestic violence. Austerity exacerbates these deaths by cutting off services that are lifelines for women.

Labour locally in Doncaster may be mistakenly celebrating the blow to the Women's Lives Matter campaign, but they continue to underestimate the determination of clients, ex-clients and community campaigners. Campaign members are learning that we must boldly tackle austerity, by not only getting the Tories out also by calling out the contradictions of Labour locally.

Louise has been made an example of what happens to workers who fight back and resist the cuts. Let's organise to show the Tories and the Blairites in Labour what happens when they attack workers and implement cuts.

- Women's Lives Matter and stand up for Louise rally - 27 January at 12 noon at Mansion House, Doncaster

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## Victory against government's war on eastern European homeless

Paul Heron, solicitor, Public Interest Law Unit (personal capacity)

For the past year and a half the Tory government has been waging a war against European Economic Area (EEA) nationals, including locking up those citizens en masse, without charge and indefinitely. Not in the mainstream news? Of course not, those affected were largely from eastern Europe and were homeless.

I became involved in these cases after campaigners and those directly affected contacted me. What became clear is that civil liberties and human rights were thrown out of the window. To make matters worse, a scheme

designed by the Home Office to sweep up homeless people was aided by leading homelessness charities.

The Home Office policy designated those European nationals sleeping rough as breaking the law - or rather by sleeping rough they were breaking European laws on the right of workers to free movement.

For the Home Office and their new policy that provided a green light to confiscate the documents of EEA nationals sleeping rough - demanding that they leave the UK within 28 days. In addition, it allowed the arrest and the detention of those who were homeless pending removal from the UK.

The Home Office argued it was necessary in order to target migrants who came to the UK 'with the intention of sleeping rough.'

In the run up to the legal challenge in the High Court I visited dozens of people trapped in detention centres across the UK. Many of those visited, prior to being detained, had full-time jobs, or had been working for years, been caught in a perfect storm of illness and austerity, leading to them losing their jobs.

In one case, a client who was between accommodation, sleeping in a van, and waiting for his wages that week to put a deposit down on a room in a flat, was detained for seven months.

Needless to say after we obtained an interim injunction, he was released with no money and found that he had lost his job. He had been in the UK for three years, and been working for that whole time!

## **High Court victory**

The case I brought was a test case involving three people. Two from Poland, one from Latvia. The High Court found in our favour. It ruled that the Home Office policy was unlawful, that the policy was discriminatory and that they were guilty of 'systematic verification' - in effect the government was guilty of orchestrating sweeps of homeless people without distinction.

That decision, on 14 December was a victory against the Home Office policy, but most significantly a policy developed when Theresa May was the home secretary.

As a socialist lawyer it feels like a constant battle for peoples' rights, and a battle against draconian laws.

For workers who become homeless it is an absolute disaster on many levels. No one should be criminalised for a problem that has been created and conceived by this government.

Freedom of movement should not be a preserve of the rich, and neither should a home!

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## **Women rally defiantly in London**

**Socialist Party members attended the Time's Up demo at Downing Street on Sunday 21st January. Amalia, a member of Tower Hamlets Socialist Party, wrote the following report.**

Over 1,000 women, of all ages and backgrounds but mainly many young women, defied the cold, the rain and the snow and joined this event.

We ran out of leaflets and received many joining cards [to join the Socialist Party] from women who are angry and frustrated with sexual harassment and sexism but also see how these issues link up with the fight against austerity and the profit driven capitalist system.

The massive 'Women marches' a year ago in the US against Trump quickly became a mass political manifestation against his reactionary agenda.

All around the world, including in London, this mood was reflected by the many thousands of women protesting against sexism and misogyny.

The mass participation of women in #metoo shows how big the problem is. But it has also boosted further women's confidence to fight back.

Many of these women understand that this struggle isn't separate from other struggles against the system.

That cuts and austerity affect women in so many specific ways. That we still need to fight for our right not to be harassed, for equal pay, for decent public services.

That in order to truly fight against oppression we need to fight for a different society and get rid of this profit driven system that thrives on keeping us divided.

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## **Gentrification scourge hits Kent**

**Chas Berry, North Kent Socialist Party**

So-called 'gentrification' is on its way to parts of north Kent that are being packaged as the 'Thames Gateway'. As house prices and sky-high rents put London beyond the reach of many working class people, this scourge is making its way along the commuter lines looking for attractive locations to prey upon.

Its latest target is Strood, part of the Medway Towns, where plans to build a multi-million pound riverside development threaten to push aside the residents of Kingswear Gardens, currently sitting on this prime site.

Up to 80 social tenants could lose their homes if the plans go ahead. Rachel Tree who lives with her ten-year-old son on the estate said: "We came here for a fresh start after 18-months in temporary accommodation. It's a good area and my son goes to a local special school. I'll be devastated if we are forced to move."

Tenants are angry that Orbit and Moat housing associations, who own most of the properties, refused to attend the consultation events in Strood, leaving Medway council officials shrugging their shoulders. "I feel they are just passing the buck" said Rachel. "There is a huge housing crisis and we need to know what will happen to us."

Fear and uncertainty now affects the community, which includes a number of homeowners who are unable to sell their properties. The newly formed Kingswear Action Group has pledged to resist this latest round of social cleansing.

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## **Kirklees council opens consultation of library services**

**Matt Hirst, Huddersfield Socialist Party**

For the third year running, Kirklees council is looking to make cuts to its library services. A further £1.9 million is to be cut from the library services budget for 2018-19.

With many outlying libraries already staffed and run by volunteers, people are scratching their heads at how much more library services can be cut.

In Milnsbridge where I live, we used to have a library, and there still is a library building, with artwork on the outside promoting reading - however no books are to be found inside.

The next closest library to me, in Golcar, is fully run by volunteers, giving their spare time and knowledge to run the library, as they understand the importance and need for a library in outlying villages.

They don't just provide books and education for the people, but a place to hold groups for the community come together.

Huddersfield is a Labour-run council so the torrent of cuts on this particular service is hard to stomach.

The council has opened an online-only consultation and is giving the following choices on the type of body the library service would be going forward:

1. Remaining as a service within the council
2. The library service is set up as a company, but remains owned by the council
3. The library services leave the councils ownership and is set up as a trust, with potential employee ownership
4. Outsourced - owned by an external company, and they retain the profits
5. Joint Venture - external investment into the library services, with the external companies retaining ownership and or control of the services

Huddersfield Socialist Party is imploring all Kirklees residents to voice their opinion through this consultation, and demand that the council refuses to continue to implement cuts set by budgets from central government and instead set a needs budget.

The council can also make use of its reserves and prudent borrowing powers to fund the services that its residents need.

- The consultation is open until 2 April at [kirklees.gov.uk/beta/libraries/library-consultation.aspx](http://kirklees.gov.uk/beta/libraries/library-consultation.aspx)

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## Southampton: Pay rise for uni boss, job losses for lecturers

**Josh Asker, Southampton Socialist Party**

Universities in England have become a microcosm of capitalism. At Southampton University the vice-chancellor has awarded himself a pay rise to £424,000, while at the same time making plans to sack over 50 lecturers.

Socialist Students' campaigning in Southampton has pressured the student union into action. A referendum has been held where 91% of the 2,000 plus students asked said that the vice-chancellor's pay should be cut as part of the university restructure.

What the student union will do with this mandate is unclear. But Socialist Students knows what it takes to beat the bosses. We will mobilise students in their anger about the fat cat pay and in defence of their lecturers.

Linking this to the ideas of socialism, that universities should be run in the interests of students and their workers.

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## Obituary

# Red Mary - a Force of Nature

Mike Forster & Alistair Tice, Yorkshire Socialist Party

Longstanding Doncaster Socialist Party member Mary Jackson sadly died last week after a year long battle against cancer.

We send condolences to her husband of 50 years John, and their children Michael, Carol and Peter.

Mary became a socialist through her experiences in the 1984 miners' strike, when with her friend she would picket the local pit and [got involved in Women Against Pit Closures](#).

Her other huge influence was reading Robert Tressell's classic novel The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists. Mary kept wishing this book was updated and finally decided to take that job on herself by writing [The Great Money Trick](#), which explains how the workers are robbed by the bosses. Partly autobiographical, this is a wonderful glimpse into working class life in her village, Thorne, where she lived for 50 years.

Mary first came across Militant, the forerunner of the Socialist Party, in 1990 during the anti-poll tax campaign.

On a May Day demo, she introduced herself as Red Mary, warning that our arguments had better be good as she was a 'a bloody good socialist, self taught by the struggle.' When she finally joined us - for which she was later expelled from the Labour Party - she told us: 'I'm not joining the Militant, you're joining me'.

From the mid-1990s Mary stood as a socialist election candidate in Thorne several times, always getting a good vote, reflecting how well known and respected she was.

In the 2010 general election she felt privileged to be asked by the transport trade union RMT to be the election agent for its member Bill Rawcliffe who was standing against Ed Miliband, at that time Labour's transport minister.

In 2013, the late Bob Crow, then general secretary of the RMT, spoke alongside Mary at a packed meeting in the Trades Club, to launch Mary's campaign as the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate for Doncaster mayor.

Standing as 'Socialist Mary' against the Tory's bedroom-tax and Labour's council cuts, [she gained nearly 2,000 votes](#), which was more than one of the coalition government parties.

In recent years, as Mary struggled with mobility issues so was less active as a street campaigner, she took to social media, becoming a keyboard warrior as she helped administer the 30th 'Anniversary of the Miners' Strike' Facebook page which gained over 100,000 followers.

Mary had amazing insight and brimming self-confidence, and with her own unique brand of humour and straight talking it was impossible not to be moved by her stories and persuaded by her arguments.

Whenever a new person came to a Socialist Party meeting Mary would tell them: 'You're going to join us', as a statement of fact, such was her confidence and conviction in the rationality of socialist ideas.

But Mary wasn't just a socialist at meetings, she lived her life as a socialist. As a citizens' advice worker for over 30 years she helped literally thousands of people, and volunteered at the foodbank in Thorne. She battled through all her own adversities to help other people.

Mary was a wonderful mother and wife. One of her proudest moments was when her husband, John, organised and led his workmates off a construction site in solidarity with the huge demonstrations against the second round of pit closures in the 1990s.

Mary Jackson was such a strong woman, a working class fighter and an eternal optimist in a socialist future, an inspiration to all who had the privilege to struggle alongside her for a better society.

Mary thought she would go on forever. Sadly not, but we can carry on her fight against injustice and inequality and for that socialist future she so believed in.

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*Mary's funeral will be on Wednesday 14th February, 2-30pm, at Rosehill crematorium, Cantley, DN4 6HE.*

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## **Obituary: Maureen Mulhearn 1945-2018**

It is with great sorrow that we report the death of Maureen Mulhearn, lifelong partner of Tony Mulhearn.

With Tony, a leader of the immortal struggle of Liverpool council in 1980s, she played a vital and massive role in her steadfast support for him and for the mass struggles of her native city against the ravages of Thatcherism and capitalism.

Although not formally a member of the Socialist Party and its predecessor Militant, she was an enthusiastic and forthright supporter all her life.

For that alone she will be remembered and saluted by many, even those who did not meet her personally. She supported ours and Tony's common struggle for a new society of human solidarity - of socialism.

To those who did forge bonds of friendship with her, she will always be remembered for her serene, generous but at the same time feisty personality.

She will be greatly missed by all of us alongside Tony, her seven children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, as well as by members of the Socialist Party in Merseyside and elsewhere.

**Peter Taaffe**

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## **Carillion and the construction industry**

**The following letter by Socialist Party member and construction worker Jimmy Tyson was published in the Liverpool Echo earlier this week:**

Recent events surrounding construction giant Carillion have exposed the problem in general within the construction industry.

The media are reporting that thousands of jobs are at risk as a result of recent financial problems. But the reality is, that the majority of the men and women working on not just Carillion sites but all construction sites across the country have for years been living in fear of job insecurity.

The construction industry prefers to employ workers through bogus self employment, CIS [Construction Industry Scheme], umbrella companies and using exploitive employment agencies, all in order to exempt workers from employment law, notice period and holiday pay.

They have consistently tried to de-skill the industry with things like BESNA in order to employ unqualified electricians at a lower rate and modularisation to reduce the amount of qualified skilled workers needed on site. Also exploiting migrant workers, paying them less than their British counterparts.

Carillion refused to work with Unite the union in agreeing a national agreement when statistics show that unionised sites are safer, more productive sites.

In their drive to drive down wages what they ended up with was a load of unqualified workers and agency workers working on a week to week basis with no loyalty to a company who refuse to directly employ them; and no motivation.

This is why jobs have taken longer to complete - because of the total disrespect shown to hard working construction workers.

This isn't just a problem for Carillion, so all the other construction giants need to get their houses in order as this is the future of the industry if they don't end bogus self-employment, cooperate with trade unions and allow their sites to be fully unionised and start directly employing qualified trades men and women and paying union recognised rates of pay.

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## **The Socialist inbox**

# **Carillion crisis exposes PFI chaos**

The government can ride out this Carillion crisis - unless the trade unions and Corbyn force them out and get him into Number 10, and the workers are bailed out with their jobs and livelihoods. These jobs need doing. Let the state be THE provider.

**Nancy Taaffe, Walthamstow, east London**

The death of PFI? Nationalise Carillion's government contracts!

**Matt Carey, Bristol**

Sally Morgan, a former minister under Tony Blair, joined the board of Carillion last year. Where do you go to do further damage after you've been chair of Ofsted? The audit, business integrity, nomination, remuneration and sustainability committees of Carillion of course!

**Martin Powell-Davies, Sydenham, south London**

Companies like Carillion exist pretty much in order to transfer wealth out of the public purse and into already pretty heavy private pockets.

**Jacqui Berry, Gillingham, Kent**

Carillion 'wins' contract. Subcontracts it to subcontractors, who subcontract, etc etc. The workers who do the work get peanuts. Up the workers.

**Wally Kennedy, Northwood, west London**

How hard is it to provide children with school meals? Or provide cleaners for prisons?

Thatcher and Blair said the private sector could do better than the public sector, bringing in expertise and new ideas. They delivered fat profits for themselves and their voracious shareholders, while workers are now faced

with the dole. Who's paying for the risks of capitalism?

Jeremy Corbyn says this nails the dogma of outsourcing. He is right.

This must be fought for now by the TUC and all unions representing Carillion workers, for all jobs and services to be protected, through renationalisation. It is a policy that should be implemented by all Labour councils.

**Nick Chaffey, Southampton**

Carillion's sharp practices are familiar to tenants in housing associations, councils and other social housing. Housing co-ops have been pressurised to contract out work for years. Bring back direct labour organisations under democratic control.

And the BBC journalist Emily Maitliss is incredulous that school meals and bin collections could be state run. Really? Growing up, I remember all this and much more carried out by local authorities. Why not again? Contracting out on the cheap and poverty wages has led to Carillion.

**Niall Mulholland, Forest Gate, east London**

This is how privatisation always worked. Buying into it is like walking into a car dealer and believing everything the salesman tells you. Except there is no recall policy in the contract, and the only guarantee is that whatever goes wrong, you'll have to pay for it.

**Stephen Edwards, Chicago, USA**

Even now, after the Carillion collapse and a National Audit Office report says PFIs cost 40% more, the Blairites are defending Blair's legacy of privatisation and outsourcing.

John McTernan was one of Blair's political strategists. Read this: "The problem is that we are all a little squeamish. Companies going out of business is part and parcel of how capitalism works - it is essential that there is both creativity and destruction..."

Leaves no doubt that these people are the agents of capitalism inside Corbyn's Labour. Kick them out, along with PFI and destructive capitalism.

**Alistair Tice, Sheffield**

While workers were told to turn up and work normally, Carillion had blocked such things as fuel cards without informing their van drivers who would find out only after filling Carillion's vehicles with fuel. But access to payment for the fuel had been withdrawn. Just imagine how that must have left those workers feeling.

As other corporate sharks circle around waiting to gnaw at the bones of Carillion and its workers, let's think about those at the top of Carillion who bailed out just at the right time making sure their pension pot was full.

**'Rebel with a Cause', Rotherham**

Carillion executives have paid out dividends and bonuses, fiddled the books, bid for more contracts and dumped their own shares while they knew the company was insolvent. They should be in prison.

**Laurence Maples, Clapham, south London**

I can't help thinking that the Carillion bosses should have spoken to Richard Branson, the expert in accumulating millions from public sector contracts!

# Universal credit: set up to fail

**Only a few days after the roll-out of the Tories' new 'universal credit' benefits system, the working poor, disabled and most vulnerable in our society are already suffering. Ronnie, an income officer for a housing trust in Halton, Merseyside, spoke to the Socialist Party's Stephen Armstrong about the difficulties encountered by claimants and her own organisation.**

"Since the roll-out of universal credit full service hit Halton in July 2016, claimants are required to apply online and then create a journal which they must keep up to date and use to query payments or discuss their claim with their work coach or case worker. For elderly people or some of our clients with mental health or special needs, this can present real problems.

"The 55p-a-minute helpline put many clients off ringing for advice. We aren't allowed to contact the DWP [Department for Work and Pensions] without the client being present - and when we do, we get through to a call centre which could be anywhere in the country.

"Operators don't have local knowledge. Often the computer system is down or the operator won't have all the information. It feels like the government wants the system to fail."

The disastrous housing policy of the Tory government is adding to the problems. Ronnie told us: "Social landlords have to bid for funding to develop new properties. The government can determine what type of scheme and mix of property size or tenure type they want.

## Delays

"Social landlords are having to wait for universal credit payments to be made from the DWP and they can be delayed sometimes for more than a couple of months. Compare this to housing benefit paid from the local authority, where payments would be made direct to social landlords on a regular four-weekly cycle.

"The rents that do come in have to be allocated to repairs, staff wages, et cetera - leaving little for us to bid on new property with, meaning a smaller pool of suitable properties for claimants.

"The six-week wait for claims to come through is creating problems across the board for clients.

"The benefit cap has already had a negative effect on their finances and now they are having to make hard choices with the little money they have. It can often come down to food or rent, and few people will let their families go hungry if they can put off paying the rent instead.

"Claimants can apply for advance payments of universal credit, which isn't something they widely publicise. It's an advance on your personal allowance, but universal credit makes you pay it back over six months.

"But what they also fail to publicise is that it can be paid back over 12 months - and you have to prove financial hardship. Well surely the mere fact that you're asking for advance payment means you're struggling financially?

"Vulnerable clients, already struggling with disability or mental health issues, are now suffering with anxiety as they juggle the various issues around universal credit and housing benefit. It can be very distressing for staff who want to help, but are unable to, through no fault of their own."

This means housing trusts are issuing more repossession orders, although many are not followed through as payments can arrive in the nick of time. Emergency 'discretionary payments' are available from local councils - but few are aware of them, or how to claim.

The few houses available to housing trusts are in great demand. This gives families two choices. Sit on an ever-growing waiting list with no certainty of getting an affordable home. Or pay over the odds to private landlords without the protections guaranteed by social housing tenancy agreements.

Ronnie told us there is little optimism among her colleagues that things will improve for their clients or the housing system in general. "We're already sending out more rent arrears notices and repossession orders. We're dealing with more and more distressed clients every week.

"Our workload has increased and staff are becoming frustrated, and stressed, with a system which seems set up to discourage people from claiming. It definitely feels that universal credit is about forcing people off benefits and into low-paid jobs, which means our clients have little chance of moving up the property ladder."

The only solution to these problems is a socialist programme of mass council house building, rent controls, and reversing all cuts to benefits and public services, so they are properly run and accessible to everybody.

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## **The Socialist inbox**

### **Do you have something to say?**

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbox, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, phone 020 8988 8771 or email [editors@socialistparty.org.uk](mailto:editors@socialistparty.org.uk).

We reserve the right to shorten and edit letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

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### **Forced out of the NHS**

I work for the NHS. With only a 22.5-hours-a-week contract, I have to pick up extra hours from the 'bank' at the hospital. During recent months these have dwindled considerably.

I recently applied for bank work with a response centre. These centres answer calls from elderly and disabled people with alarms fitted in their homes.

Up until six months ago this service was manned by six to eight full-time staff. It is now manned by a skeleton staff, mostly lone workers, with the manager told she cannot appoint contract staff, only bank staff, until it can be sold off to a private company.

I love my job but cannot cope with the insecurity and am contemplating leaving the NHS.

**NHS worker, Devon**

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### **Building regulations**

In light of the Grenfell Tower disaster, with its tragic loss of human life, the focus has rightly turned to the adequacy of existing building regulations, particularly in relation to fire safety. We have also seen government repeatedly and mysteriously refuse to update these regulations in the light of incidents which exposed their shortcomings.

In addition, pressure groups such as the 'Red Tape Initiative' have plans post-Brexit to dismantle regulations on construction materials. A perhaps more worrying example of official reluctance to update regulations can be found in a Northern Ireland government-facilitated report, the 2016 Housing Supply Forum report, which recommends that "any further increase in building regulation requirements incurring additional build costs

should be deferred until volumes have recovered significantly... Stability in regulations will help to control build costs, increase certainty, and facilitate increasing build volumes."

While the Grenfell inquiry will no doubt result in recommendations on the construction materials to be used in future, it is surely essential to take immediate action throughout the country to ensure that safety forms the basis of any building regulation, and doesn't become an option to be added when "volumes" - ie profits - are high.

**George Dunn, Belfast Metropolitan Residents Group**

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