



nationalshopstewardsnetwork

NHS Bulletin

Bulletin No. 2

Defend the NHS Build for a 24-hour general strike



- **NO to attacks on our pay and pensions. For the health unions to fight in defence of our living conditions.**
- **NO to job cuts. For an increase in well paid, properly trained jobs to meet the needs of service users.**
- **NO to the Health and Social Care Act. For a free, publicly funded, national health service.**
- **NO to PFI. Kick big business out of the NHS and cancel the debt.**
- **NO to Foundation Trusts. For democratic control of local health services by elected representatives of workers and services users.**
- **NO to private companies profiteering from our health service. Nationalise the pharmaceutical industry and all outsourced services.**
- **Yes to a mass campaign to save our NHS. For a trade union led national demonstration followed by industrial action to defend the NHS.**

The ConDem government's attacks on the National Health Service are sending it spinning towards destruction. A recent report by the Royal College of Physicians shows the terrifying levels of diminishing resources to demand in the NHS. The number of NHS beds is more than 30% less than 25 years ago, despite having to deal with almost 40% more emergency admissions. This stretch on

resources will inevitably worsen with the threat of £20 billion cuts being implemented over the next few years. Another report, by the King's Fund health think-tank, showed that almost half of NHS finance chiefs say that, starting from next year, they will not be able to make the cuts without significantly harming the level of care given. The chief economist at the King's Fund said NHS trusts have

been able to make "savings" this year without significantly affecting the service provided, partly due to the public-sector pay freeze. Health workers refuse to accept that to defend the level of care given, we must feel the effect of the cuts in our own living conditions. The results of a BBC poll show that the government's plans for the NHS remain unpopular with the public. Over 60% of

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people polled expect the NHS will stop providing services due to financial reasons. The same percentage said they did not think it was right that some services should go to save money. Most damningly, almost 75% said they did not trust the government to "get it right" on the NHS. People are right not to trust this government. Since their election, nursing numbers have dropped by 6,000.

Health workers hoping for some rare good news may have thought there was some when the hated Andrew Lansley, architect of the Health and Social Care act, was ditched in the recent cabinet reshuffle. But, as if things couldn't get worse, his replacement as health secretary is... Jeremy Hunt! The same Jeremy Hunt who after being put in charge of overseeing News Corporation's BSkyB bid was in contact with James Murdoch, even congratulating him on the bid. With the Health and Social Care Act opening up new opportunities for big business to get rich off of the trusted "brand" of the NHS, Hunt is clearly seen as the man to maximise those opportunities. Indeed, earlier this year he personally intervened to allow Virgin Care to take over the running of seven NHS hospitals in his constituency. He also reportedly tried to have

the section of the Olympic opening ceremony that celebrated the NHS removed. At the Labour Party Conference, shadow health secretary Andy Burnham claimed a Labour government would reverse the rapid privatisation of the NHS. However, as with their familiar chant of the ConDems' austerity programme being "too far, too fast", it is clearly the level and speed Labour apparently oppose, rather than privatisation itself. It was Labour itself that greatly accelerated the use of PFI hospitals, a source that is still draining huge amounts of money from the NHS.

The lack of real opposition shown by Labour does not mean that health workers are fighting alone. The attacks on the NHS are just one part of the government's wider ideological attack on the living conditions of working class people and on every aspect of the welfare state. In the previous NHS bulletin, we emphasised the role that the trade unions should play by building for mass demonstrations and following up with industrial action. Two massive steps towards this have been taken with the calling of the TUC anti-austerity demonstrations on 20 October, and with the passing of "Motion 5" at the TUC congress in favour of a

general strike against the government's austerity.

The motion, moved by the Prison Officers Association (POA), was overwhelmingly voted for by the delegates at the congress. Speaker after speaker pointed to the brutal attacks being made by the ConDem government and the need for them to be stopped by the trade union movement through general strike action involving both the public and private sectors. Opposition speakers tried to convince delegates to vote against the motion stating that the government would use the call for a general strike as "a big stick to beat us". Replying to the debate, Steve Gillan from the POA answered forcefully: "The government is already using a big stick against us, and it is hurting". The major health unions Unison and Unite both supported the motion, which represents a huge step forward in the struggle to mobilize the weight of the trade union movement against the government's cuts agenda.

The National Shop Stewards Network has been at the forefront of building support for the idea of a 24-hour general strike, including lobbying the TUC the day before the motion was discussed. All health activists should help to build the momentum by encouraging discussions and debates in the trade union branches and anti-cuts groups, and passing motions in favour of the call for a general strike and demanding the TUC name a date.

Local campaigns: Defend national pay and conditions



These and other measures add up to a 15% cut in workers pay and conditions.

The document also reveals the strategy and tactics that the consortium plans to use to drive through their objectives. Gone is the language of social partnership and working with staff, instead they discuss defeating all resistance because as they rightly conclude, if the trade unions successfully defend their members over the cartel then other issues such as cuts and privatisation would be much more difficult to force through.

Furthermore to illustrate what lengths they would go to, ultimately the consortium plans to give notice to staff who refuse to give in, and then offer them redeployment on their new, inferior, contracts. So in effect next year 64,000 health workers could face the sack!

Of course one of the factors promoting this operation, is the economic crisis facing the NHS. Funding has fallen from a 6% increase per year under Labour (much of it going to the private sector) to just 0.4% per annum. Alongside the cost of PFI, and privatisation, this represents the biggest financial cutbacks in the history of the NHS.

The document also makes clear that NHS South West bosses had hoped that the unions would make significant concessions nationally. Although elements of the leadership would undoubtedly sell out, nevertheless they have come under enormous pressure from the rank and file not to concede any hard won benefits. Frustrated at the lack of, as they see it, progress, these trusts, no doubt encouraged by the government, have formed this pay cartel.

It is also clear that if they succeed in their plans, national collective bargaining will be fatally undermined. In fact South West bosses are saying that they have been contacted by other NHS regions, who are keen to develop their own pay structures. Once regional terms and conditions are established, the solidarity and strength of the union would be severely weakened, and inevitably there would be a race to the bottom, with low paid workers the most vulnerable.

Moreover if local pay is imposed in the NHS, which is the biggest employer in Britain, the defence of national collective bargaining will be undermined through-



out the public and private sector.

It is also the case that the move towards regional pay is related to the privatisation of the NHS, with the potential creation of an exploited low paid workforce, a source of massive profits for the greedy private health companies.

This is a decisive moment for trade unions in the NHS, and we need to use all our power and strength to defend both our members and our health service.

In the South West UNISON should immediately call a regional demonstration and hold a consultative ballot over industrial action. A massive yes vote would not only raise the confidence of workers, but would give a real warning to management that if they pursue this course of action they would meet mighty resistance. Then if the trust board endorses the plan, there should be an immediate ballot for sustained industrial action to be maintained until not only regional pay is defeated, but so is every single proposal that undermines workers terms and conditions.

There also should be no concession bargaining in the name of defending AFC by the Unison leadership, because we cannot lose nationally what we are defending locally.

Ultimately these attacks on the public and private sector can only be defeated by the combined resistance of the whole trade union movement – and that fight back should start with a 24 hour general strike.



Local campaigns: Nationalise the PFI contracts



Across South-East London we are witnessing a massive onslaught on hospital services. As a result of dodgy PFI (commonly known as Profit From Illness) deals the local health trust has been placed under administration. The bankruptcy of South London Healthcare trust, if left unchallenged will see a massive attack on jobs and services at the three hospitals of Queen Elizabeth in Woolwich, Queen Mary's in Sidcup and Princess Royal in Bromley. The main reason for this crisis is the extortionate

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts at Queen Elizabeth and Princess Royal. This is costing the trust 14% of its budget and is the main reason the trust is losing £1 million per week. Across the NHS nationally PFI contracts are draining the NHS of £1.5 billion every year. Let's be clear it was the previous Tory government under John Major which initiated these PFI contracts, the PFI contract at Queen Elizabeth was signed under a Labour government.

But the PFI contracts are not the only attack the NHS is suffering. The coalition government's Health and Social care act threatens to accelerate the cuts and privatisations that are crippling the NHS to breaking point. Recent cuts we have already seen include £500,000 cut in Lewisham from the budget for children's mental health services. Already Hinchbrook hospital in Cambridgeshire has been taken over by a non-state provider. Privatisation, as well as meaning cuts and a worse service, would see the decimation of wages and conditions for

health workers.

We need a campaign that links the communities that depend on the hospitals with workers at the hospitals. The administrators called in by the government will look to plug the debt by making huge cuts. This will mean the loss of services for thousands of people. It will also mean that staff at the hospitals will see attacks made on jobs and pay.

On the 10th September around 150 people marched in Greenwich calling for an end to PFI and cuts to local hospitals. That demonstration was a fantastic show of anger at the destruction of the health service in South East London. We need to step up the campaign from here; we call on the trade union movement in South East London to bring together a campaign of trade unionists and community campaigners to stop the attacks on our hospitals. What is going to stop these attacks is action being taken by the workers at the hospitals. They can show who really keeps the NHS running, ordinary doctors and nurses.

Who are we?

The National Shop Stewards Network was set up in 2007 to build the strength of our working-class movement from the bottom up by creating local, regional and national networks to put elected reps and shop stewards from different unions in permanent contact with each other. Organising mutual solidarity when trade unions are in dispute is at the heart of our work. We also share information to develop ways of successfully resisting attacks on our union rights, jobs, pay, conditions and pensions. We aim to build a movement that can help sweep the anti-union laws off the books and make them inoperable in the meantime. Bringing new blood into our movement is vital so the NSSN will encourage younger workers, agency and migrant workers to join their unions, organise in their workplaces and become reps themselves.

This bulletin has been set up by NSSN supporters working in the health service in order to put forward a strategy and link up with like minded trade unionists. If you are involved in a campaign or dispute let us know so we can put you in touch with NSSN supporters in your local area. Also we would welcome contributions for further bulletins. Please e-mail any contributions to; info@shopsteward.net and put "NHS bulletin" in the subject box.



The NSSN is supported by:

