

# Coalition steps up assault on NHS **fastnews**

RECENTLY, THE anti-cuts website False Economy published its findings from NHS Trusts which showed that well over 50,000 health workers' jobs will be axed. These job losses, as well as hospital A&E, ward and department closures, show that David Cameron's general election pledge, that spending on NHS services would be protected by the government, is just hogwash.

Roger Davey, Unison health executive (writing in a personal capacity), explains how the NHS is being systematically destroyed by the government, and what is needed to fight this assault on our health services.

**N**OBODY SHOULD underestimate the scale and nature of the coalition government's attack on the NHS. If these proposals are implemented we will see the dismantling, destruction and eventual privatisation of the NHS. It will mean the end of free comprehensive care, and a significant move towards a US-style system.

This programme of privatisation was, of course, begun under the previous Labour government. However, the combining of an acceleration of privatisation with the biggest financial cuts in NHS history will result in a huge wave of ward closures and mass redundancies.

The government's proposals include:

- Giving £80 billion of our NHS money to GP consortiums who are supposed to buy care on our behalf. In reality these organisations are likely to be taken over by private consortiums, accountable to shareholders, who will put the need to make a profit above the interests of patients, and will seek to buy treatment from the cheapest possible provider in the private sector.

- To scrap the NHS as a provider of health care. All NHS organisations will move into or become Foundation Trusts (FTs), which in effect will act like private companies. They will be free to borrow on the financial markets, free to break away from national collective bargaining, and crucially will have the cap on the number of private patients they can treat lifted.



The government's health care 'reforms' will fatally undermine the NHS.

photo Paul Mattsson

- It is also likely that the government will abolish the tariff pricing system for health treatment. This means that consortiums and private insurance can buy from the cheapest health provider irrespective of the quality of care.

All of this would lead to the growing domination of multinational companies in the provision of health. Increasingly these profit hungry giants will take over FTs and other former NHS organisations.

However, the government will face enormous opposition from NHS workers and the wider community in trying to implement this programme.

If the health unions lead an effective opposition the government can certainly be defeated. Unison members are prepared to fight in defence of the NHS and their pay and conditions. That is why the Unison health executive, feeling the pressure from below, overwhelmingly voted to

oppose the Unison leadership's attempt to sign up to a completely inadequate deal.

We now have to harness the anger of Unison members in order to organise a struggle to defeat the government's plans. The first step is for a massive mobilisation of health workers to the TUC demo on 26 March. This needs to be a step towards a one-day public sector general strike in opposition to all cuts and privatisation.

## Energy rip-off

British Gas, the privatised energy giant, recently announced a 24% surge in profits in 2010. This was largely achieved on the back of screwing its customers with higher bills. Its parent company Centrica boasted a 39% rise in operating profits to £2.4 billion. Eight million British Gas customers were hit with a 7% price hike on 10 December, resulting in an average customer's dual fuel bill rising from £1,157 to £1,239. The price increase coincided with the UK recording the coldest December temperature in 100 years.

The usual lame excuse from British Gas was to blame the price rise on rising wholesale prices. However, Centrica has a major stake in gas fields in Norway and elsewhere, meaning that they also benefit from rising wholesale prices.

Back in 2008 Centrica's managing director, Jake Ulrich, said consumers struggling with record-high gas prices should keep warm by putting on two jumpers. A better idea would be to renationalise all the privatised energy utilities to provide cheap and reliable fuel for everyone.

## Failure pays

It appears to be an 'iron law' of capitalist finance that irrespective of how badly a bank performs it is obliged to handsomely reward its top dogs. The latest bank to apply this law is the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), which has just given £1 million each to 100 of its bankers and £2.04 million to its boss Stephen Hester.

This bonus bonanza makes a mockery of the government's 'Project Merlin' deal with the banks, which was meant to deliver restraint on bonuses and top salaries in return for not introducing financial regulations on the City.

In case anyone has forgotten, RBS holds the record for the biggest bank loss in UK history. In 2008 it recorded a £24 billion loss, £3.6 billion in 2009 and £1.1 billion last year.

And while hundreds of thousands of public sector workers face redundancy and millions of people are being subjected to government cuts in services and benefits, RBS has been saved from collapse by the last Labour government and the present Con-Dem coalition with a bailout of billions of pounds from public funds.

## Westminster: Save our children's services

**T**ORY-RUN WESTMINSTER council in London is planning to cut services provided to children and parents/carers at Sure Start centres in the borough.

Elizabeth O'Hara

Save Our Children's Services Westminster (SOCSW) is a local campaign that has been set up to oppose the cuts. Local parents have produced a leaflet and a petition and spread information in playgrounds, drop-ins, schools and libraries about the proposed cuts.

The council says that because Sure Start funding has been cut at national level, then there must be cuts locally. However, many local residents don't accept the argument that cuts 'simply have to be

made'. The council also says that they want to target the limited services that will remain at the most vulnerable families. However, the proposed cuts to under-fives drop in services, outreach teams and parent support will affect all those who use the services, including the most vulnerable households.

The council started a four-week consultation on 8 February on these proposed cuts to Sure Start services. However, the local councillors will vote on the budget for next year on 2 March, nine days before the consultation finishes! Local people are angry that decisions are to be made without any meaningful consultation.

The council called a borough-wide meeting for parents on 1 March, but made no effort to publicise it. SOCSW heard about it, pub-

licised the meeting and encouraged parents to go along and protest at the cuts. The council were clearly frightened by the potential turnout and started to actively discourage parents from attending.

But over 100 angry parents turned up with their children. Council officials immediately tried to break the meeting up into small groups to avoid one big meeting.

Parents were unwilling to be fobbed off like this and one of the SOCSW organisers proposed a vote, with the vast majority of parents in favour of continuing the meeting in one group. This allowed parents to question the council officials and express their own views.

One speaker after another expressed opposition to the cuts. Parents became even more annoyed when the officials tried to portray

the changes to the service as an improvement.

Eventually, they were forced to admit that there could be a 20% cut to Sure Start funding in Westminster. Many parents signed up to the SOCSW campaign and to lobby the council on 2 March.

**● Westminster council also wants to make it an offence to sleep rough at the same time as slashing £5 million of funding to hostels. It claims soup kitchens provided by charities only "encourage" people to sleep on the streets.**

**Westminster council, one of the richest in Britain, wants to make it an offence to "give out food for free", punishable by fines. So much for David Cameron's 'big society' idea to encourage voluntary services!**

## Who 'agrees with Nick' now?

**A**SIX-foot high security fence. A special unit of 1,000 police. Late night court sittings. Sounds like the West Bank? No, welcome to the Lib Dems' spring conference in Sheffield on 11-13 March!

Alistair Tice,  
Sheffield

At a cost of up to £2 million a 'ring of steel' will be thrown around the City Hall to protect the Lib Dems from the anger of Sheffield folk who feel betrayed by Sheffield Hallam MP and deputy prime minister, Nick Clegg.

Clegg says: 'I am proud that I can play a small role in getting people to

come to Sheffield.' Yes Nick, there will be thousands of protesters coming to demonstrate against your lies and sell-outs! You broke your election pledges on tuition fees, on the VAT rise, and on spending cuts, and you put the Tories, who decimated Sheffield in the 1980s, in power.

Sheffield's Lib Dem council will propose £80 million council cuts for this year at the budget setting meeting on 4 March.

Sheffield Labour councillors have protested against the Lib Dem cuts. But they could have stopped them. Since a Lib Dem councillor defected in the autumn, Labour and the two Greens could outvote the Lib Dems.

Instead they say: "We will act as a responsible opposition in the best

interests of local people and our budget will protect the most vulnerable people in our City to the best of our ability." Sounds like cuts just the same.

We must mobilise to bring the coalition down and we can start building a real alternative by supporting trade unionist and socialist anti-cuts candidates in the local elections in May.

**Join the protests at the Lib Dem spring conference:  
Friday 11 March, 4.30pm at the Town Hall  
Saturday 12 March, assemble 11am at Devonshire Green to march on City Hall.**

## Sterling advice

As desperate British workers flee Libya to avoid Gaddafi's violence, it is worth reflecting on the British government's UK Trade and Industry document 'Investing in Libya' of last year:

"Change is in the air... Not political change, but clear business opportunity[ies] for those patient, persistent and determined enough to take it. Personal relationships really matter a lot in Libya... you will not do business here long-distance, but by being here, often."