

NHS under attack STOP THE PRIVATISATION VULTURES

Wales: Fight the NHS cuts



A recent opinion poll shows clear opposition to Welsh Labour's plans to cut hospitals in Wales – despite health bosses claiming that the poll supports their plans to downgrade general hospitals in Wales.

According to the poll 61% said they did not “mind travelling for specialist care if it means the care will be higher quality”. The Welsh NHS confederation director, Helen Birtwhistle, claimed this meant support for their idea of downgrading hospitals by shifting services from local general hospitals to regional centres.

And what specialist services? The public probably has in mind very select services like neurology. But the Welsh health minister, Lesley Griffiths, and the NHS bosses want basic services such as cardiology and maternity, which they deem ‘specialist’, removed from district hospitals forcing patients to travel long distances.

The real feelings of the majority can be seen in the response to another question in the poll; 59% believe their local hospital should provide every type of service.

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A Huntingdon health activist and socialist

On 10 November, a £1 billion contract was announced for the private firm Circle Health to run Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, Huntingdon, for ten years ‘on behalf of the NHS’. It’s the first private company to take over the running of a NHS hospital.

However, Circle Health has admitted in its share prospectus that its business strategy is under strain as it attempts to acquire more NHS hospitals and that this “could affect its ability to provide a consistent level of service to its patients”.

The media has repeated time and again that Hinchingsbrooke is a ‘failed’ hospital with £40 million of debts. They forgot to mention that half of this debt had been created in error, and not rectified, by the previous Labour-run Department of

Health failing to pay agreed tariffs for patient services. The remainder relates to the overly-grandiose rebuilding of the hospital front, which now resembles a small airport!

Not one report mentioned that Hinchingsbrooke has no operating deficit at all. However, several key departments had been partially or fully closed. The mental health Acer Ward has closed, bowel cancer surgery cut, and a specialist maternity unit removed. There is talk of moving much of stroke care to Addenbrooke’s Hospital in Cambridge.

Job cutting

Circle now claims that the hospital will be run with no job losses and no reduction in service, while reducing the £40 million deficit and still making a profit for shareholders. It doesn’t add up. Exactly how Circle intends to achieve this miracle, other than by ‘cutting NHS bureaucracy’ ie cutting jobs and standards,

is not explained.

Moreover, Circle had debts of £82 million at the start of the year, though £43.5 million is underwritten by the Department of Health.

Hinchingsbrooke could be so downgraded that it could lose its A&E, remaining as little more than a rehabilitation centre or convalescence hospital for NHS patients with no one to care for them ‘in the community’, like a modern day workhouse hospital.

Trade unions have expressed their anger at the takeover by Circle. Unison has around 650 members who are worried about their jobs, and the Royal College of Nursing fears major job losses will be inevitable to pay for the privatisation.

The takeover of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital by Circle is the thin end



cartoon
Alan Hardman

of a very thick privatisation wedge that the Con-

Dem government is pursuing in the NHS. A policy made easier because the previous Blair and Brown Labour governments accelerated privatisation measures.

Circle’s backers include former Goldman Sachs banker Paul Ruddock who has generously donated to the Tory party.

The trade unions together with the local communities must launch a national campaign to save the NHS from destruction.

They must demand an end to privatisation measures and the reintegration of such services back into a publicly owned, fully funded, and democratically run national health service.

What we stand for

The Socialist Party fights for socialist change – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also fight, in our day-to-day campaigning, for every possible improvement for working-class people.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI), a democratic, socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state retirement pension, as a step towards a living

pension. Reinstate the link with average earnings now.

- Reject ‘Welfare to Work’. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker’s wage.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Public services

- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies and ‘free schools’!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone’s health needs – free at the point of use and under democratic control. Kick out private contractors!

- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman’s right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

New workers’ party

- For a new mass workers’ party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers’ party!

Socialism and internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Iraq and Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and banks that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses’ neo-liberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!