

Con-Dems' lethal policies threaten health service

HANDS OFF THE NHS!

Terry Pearce
Save Heatherwood Hospital campaign, personal capacity

Under cover of the Christmas break, the government slipped out two lethal policies for the National Health Service. When taken alongside other features of the Health and Social Care Bill, they will speed up the rush towards the privatisation of the NHS.

Firstly the announcement that up to 49% of work in hospitals will be private is a clear indication that a two-tier system of treatment is envisaged. Increasing numbers of beds in hospitals will be taken up by private patients, limiting access for NHS patients.

The second threat was announced by Mike Farrer, head of the NHS Confederation. He said that at least one in four patients would be better off being treated by NHS staff at home. In other words three million patients, instead of being treated in fully equipped and staffed hospitals, will be treated at home by an under-funded and under-resourced community health sector.

Of course some treatment at home makes sense, but this plan is

all about finding the £20 billion cuts to the NHS budget that the Con-Dem coalition is forcing through.

From top to bottom the government is preparing the NHS for fragmentation and privatisation. Primary Care Trusts are being replaced by Clinical Consortia dominated by general practitioners who are both commissioners and providers of health care, a clear conflict of interest. They will be responsible for £80 billion of health expenditure which will inevitably open the door to rapacious private health companies.

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The Con-Dems want 49% of work in hospitals to be private

Privatisation is a disaster in the field of social care, with the scandal of Southern Cross and their 750 care homes.

With no regulation and profit being the only motive, vulnerable people became victims to the whims of the market.

If they get away with this we will see a similar situation develop elsewhere in the NHS, with hos-

pitals closing and chunks of the service swallowed up by the private sector.

In my area, Bracknell, the fight is on to save our local hospital, Heatherwood. In spite of the popularity of the hospital, local health bosses are determined to see it closed and replaced with a privately financed, built and run Healthspace. This Healthspace will have very limited facilities and will be run by the Clinical Consortium.

This is all part of the drive to provide so called 'care in the community' on a shoestring. And it will mean local patients having to travel long distances for hospital treatment if we lose the fight to save Heatherwood.

2012 must be the year we step up the fight to save the NHS. We need a united campaign involving health trade unions, patients, anti-cuts groups and health professionals. Locally we have already collected over 16,000 names on our petition to save Heatherwood Hospital.

The battle to defend the NHS is part of the wider fight to oppose all cuts, defend pensions, oppose job losses in the public and private sectors and the need build a new political opposition to this rotten coalition government.



Demonstrating against the attacks on the NHS photo Paul Mattsson

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 'Workfare'. 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 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!