

Our health - A market for big business

YOUR HEALTH care is being privatised. Your body's ailments may worry you but to someone else they will be soon be a commodity to be bartered for, bought and sold on the free market.

By an NHS healthworker

A short while back, my colleagues and I received emails about changes to our employment. One email offered voluntary redundancy; the next advised us that we had an 'opportunity' to become part of a 'Social Enterprise Trust' (SET) - a 'third sector' business.

With short notice, we were invited to hear what this entailed and to ask questions. The previous government said staff should 'buy into' this change of setup, should it take place. The coalition government altered this to a requirement only to show evidence of staff 'engagement'. We were sent a meeting invitation and some down-loadable leaflets - how very engaging!

Most staff in the PCT (primary care trust) could not attend meetings at short notice during working hours. The managers know this and rely on it. We certainly did not have time to peruse the eleven government documents we were given a link into.

Later, hospital trusts are to be converted to similar fates - they too will be moved outside of the public sector as part of big changes to our health service. The SET system was being introduced by Labour, but now it is being introduced with urgency, to work with proposals outlined in the government's white paper (further privatisation).

People fear that proposed changes are being implemented with scant regard for the 2006 NHS Act, which says: "These NHS organisations are required to make arrangements to involve and consult patients and the public in: planning of the provision of services; the development and consideration of proposals for



Private hands off our NHS!

photo Paul Mattsson

changes in the way those services are provided, and decisions to be made by the NHS organisation affecting the operation of services."

The public were meant to be consulted. If I don't know what's going on, how on earth would people outside of the NHS?!

Deadly privatisation

ANOTHER BIG change is that GPs are to take responsibility for up to 80% of the NHS budget. Sounds good in theory. GPs know what is needed locally and see the patient as someone with lifelong needs, not just a hospital admission.

However, GPs themselves will not be spending this money. They know which areas need what, but not how to deliver. They are doctors - that's what they do - they doctor people. The job of spending will be passed on to private health groups - groups that look for a profit drawn from the NHS's 'ring-fenced' funds.

These commissioners will look for

a provider for a particular service for a particular need. The work I do has benefits which are hugely cost-saving over the rest of the patient's life, but a private company will look toward a cheap, quick-fix treatment with only short-term results. After all, shareholders won't want to wait 30 years for their dividend. These commissioning groups are big private health companies. They have been in discussions as a 'cartel' for a while already.

So who will scrutinise the performance of all the big players in this and ensure the public are safe in this new health service, if not the government or public? Who will ensure we are safe in our hospital beds or that we get the correct treatment?

The public think they get a raw deal now from the NHS but most of the complaints are about sections of the NHS long since put out to private contract - catering, cleaning, agency nurses, call centres, NHS deliveries and many more departments.

Within the NHS, quantitative outcomes dominate most treatments. In some trusts nurses doing pre-operative assessments have their time to assess so reduced that they know unsuitable patients are being sent for anaesthetic and surgery. This will get worse with markets and competition being brought fully into the NHS. People will die as a result.

In a few years, I may not have a job if our service is underutilised. Then my patients will have to be seen by the quick-fix private sector and their long-term health will probably be affected negatively. In a few years, our health service will no longer be 'national' as in 'publicly-owned' - it will be a collection of competing businesses.

I could say that the banks created a crisis for which the public sector is being made to pay, that these are back-door cuts. That is what it seems at first glance. But it is actually an ideological change to our healthcare system; it is privatisation. This is not only unnecessary, but deadly.

Coventry council - stop job cuts

"WE'RE NOT the back-room, we're the back-bone," was one council worker's comment on Coventry council's proposed redundancies, where the New Labour council is making £101 million cuts over three years.

Rob Windsor
former Socialist Party councillor, Coventry

Even before the general election, the two socialist councillors' votes were the only ones to oppose the then Tory council's £72 million cuts. Now, despite New Labour councillors hypocritically whingeing about the bad Tories, the only councillor to oppose cuts and job losses has been the remaining socialist councillor Dave Nellist.

All services are affected, but areas who fought back have gained some concessions.

The council wants 1,000 voluntary redundancies, with a pay-off of around £8,000. And for those workers left, there will be £15 million of pay cuts over the next three years.

The entire council workforce faces two choices. Either get involved in the fight against redundancy and subtle shoves towards the door - or face obliteration at the hands of a Tory government and a Labour council.

Socialist councillor Dave Nellist has called for no cuts and the council to use a combination of borrowing and use of reserves to "buy time" whilst building a mass campaign to stop cuts in government grant. This would involve meetings in every community and workplace, linked with other areas, to kick-start effective opposition aimed at the Tory-Fib Dem coalition.

Bankers: The new untouchables?

THE BANKERS' astronomical pay just won't go away, however much the Con-Dems wish it would. George Osborne asked the banks (nicely) to tell him how many of their staff earned over £1 million a year (remember: the UK average wage is £26,000). They squirmed and said no - it might increase pay demands (!), lead to competitive disadvantage etc, etc.

Paul Gerrard

According to the Times business editor: "The Chancellor appears to have swallowed the banks' line. Or perhaps he wants to bury the evidence that all efforts to curb bonuses have had little effect." British banks' half-hearted attempts to agree to rein in bonuses were scuppered by Standard Chartered's decision to pull out of the negotiations.

The banks are embarrassed. Investment arms of Barclays and RBS haven't done that well this year (all together now: A-a-a-a-h!). Barclays Capital has actually taken more staff on this year - 2,300 to be precise - so their overall bonus tally might be



photo SP Wales

even bigger than last year! By the way, does this mean a new investment bubble is under way?

The final straw was Standard Chartered. George Osborne was trying to restrict bonuses to one-year deals only. Standard Chartered is considering leaving the UK anyway for sunnier climes like Hong Kong and Singapore where multi-year bo-

nuses are typical for 'star' bankers, so it abandoned negotiations.

The Con-Dem government desperately want a face-saver so they can show 'we're all in it together'. But the bankers won't help the government off the hook and the government won't dare lay a finger on the bankers - the new untouchables.

Only Socialist Party cllr. opposes Coventry cuts

Coventry council's briefing note to its Cabinet on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), the cuts package that makes huge numbers of staff redundant and slashes services over the next three to four years, said: "...with the exception of councillor Nellist, the Board supported the MTFS and did not wish to put forward any [amendments] for consideration."

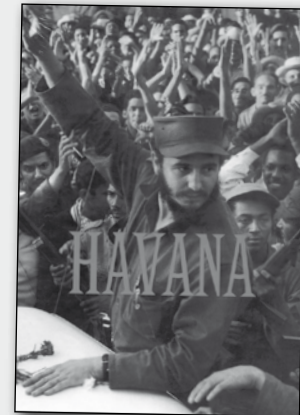
The Socialist Party should be proud to be 'the exception' when all other parties, including the Labour council, are proposing and implementing cuts!

Unison steward, Coventry

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