

## TORIES GEAR UP TO DEMOLISH NHS...

### Soft on bank bonuses, hard on the National Health Service it pledged to keep

We all remember David Cameron's election pledge: 'I'll cut the deficit, not the NHS.' The Tories promised that funding for the health service would be ringfenced while other services underwent savage cuts.

Though rising prices and increasing demand for healthcare already means a cut in real terms, George Osborne immediately outlined plans in the Comprehensive Spending Review in October, for the NHS to make £20 billion worth of internal savings.

If that wasn't bad enough, the current bill being debated in parliament at the moment, 'Equity in Excellence – Liberating the NHS', spells the end of the NHS as we know it.

Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities, who plan, procure and implement services are to

be scrapped. GPs are to take on that responsibility. The government's argument is that GPs know the needs of their patients the best. If that is the case, then surely the best place for them is in their surgeries, treating patients. Less than a month after coming to power, the ConDem coalition scrapped targets for GPs to see patients within 48 hours, a move which would allow GPs to have more time for procurement meetings, but less time for patients.

In reality, GPs do not have the skills to plan and procure services on a nationwide, or even countywide basis. If they did, there'd be very little chance of patients ever seeing them. The bill proposes that GPs form 'consortia', who will tender out services to 'any willing provider', profiteering or not. This will allow private companies to gain even more of a foothold in the NHS.

Under Labour, private companies were welcomed in with open arms. The public are now paying private firms,

at six times the real cost, for hospitals and clinics built under the Private Finance Initiative. The coalition's new plans allow profit-making companies to take on the provision of frontline healthcare.

In the US, where private companies rule the roost, profit is the motive. The rich can afford excellent care, but for everyone else it is second-rate at best. Workers have to pay into private insurance schemes to cover the cost of their healthcare. If a patient needs treatment not covered by their policy, they cannot receive it.

'Equity in Excellence' is about making market-driven 'reforms' and creating a two-tier health service. Patients needing specialist, unprofitable and expensive treatments that GP consortia have not bought into will have to pay for it themselves. We cannot allow a return to the Victorian ages, when people had to pay to see a doctor. In the short term, the bill will mean a reduction in staffing levels, a falling quality of care and diminishing access even to a GP. In the long term, the bill is even more sinister: the privatisation of our NHS.

Health unions have been very vocal in their opposition to the proposals. However, NHS staff and patients need more than just outraged words, we need deeds as well. A national demonstration to defend the NHS, properly built for by health unions, would go some way to bring together those who want to fight the cuts and privatisation taking place. It would raise the confidence of health workers, many of whom are resigned to the idea that the Coalition's plans are inevitable. It could be used as a step to building for industrial action in the NHS, which, with the support of patients, carers and communities, would force the government to retreat.

## ...BUT THE FIGHTBACK HAS BEGUN



Anti-cuts work in Kent is building a head of steam, despite opposition from the Labour Party in the area.

A campaign, Medway Against the Cuts (MAC) against the cuts is now fully operational in the Medway Towns, with burgeoning coalitions emerging from public meetings in other areas including Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells.

Socialist Party members have been instrumental in forming or coordinating such groupings, which are springing up with increasing regularity as the cuts to jobs and public services bite.

In Dover, however, a recent 'public meeting' on 25 January called by the GMB union, disgracefully stifled public debate and the appetite for independent action against the cuts. Instead of using the gathering of 50 people to form a local, broad-based anti-cuts campaign, organizers simply told attendees to vote Labour and attend the TUC demonstration on the 26 March. Only three workers from the floor managed to speak despite the chair's objections: all were critical of the Labour Party and its pro-cuts stance.

The Socialist Party will continue to encourage the formation of independent, local campaigns in opposition to all cuts and ready to take a stand against all politicians wielding the axe.

**For more info see the Medway Against the Cuts facebook page.**



# The vulnerable are being sold to the highest bidder

comment

It's clear that something is very wrong when the care of vulnerable people is used to turn a profit. The money for care, which is originally provided by tax given by the people as a provision for those who are unable to fully care for themselves, is increasingly being skimmed to fill the coffers of management, private firms and shareholders. This robbery of money that is supposed to be providing people a better and independent life people is an outrage.

New private sector staff get paid much less and have fewer benefits than their NHS colleagues, and the standard of care, therefore, is drastically reduced. Dedicated and professional staff are now replaced by underpaid, overworked and disinterested individuals trying to perform an often stressful job whilst following a plethora of guidelines from varying organizations, often being told different information from each of them.

Little support is given by management, meanwhile, who are now concerned only with the bottom line. The job of being a carer is no longer about caring: it is about profit-making – a fact constantly communicated to staff by management.

Even the health of the staff has been compromised by the rapacious nature of the system and money-saving. In a job where staff have to deal with human bodily fluids staff have been left without the proper protective equipment for months as now this equipment can now only be distributed by a head office, as this is 'financially more efficient', but puts the health of employees at risk. The victims of the change of the system are the lower level members of staff and the people the service exists to help and with the cuts in public spending we can only expect the situation to get worse.

# 2400 JOBS TO GO AT SANDWICH PFIZER



On 1 February it was announced that 2400 workers at Pfizer's research and development facility in Sandwich, Kent, will be made redundant after the company's decision to close the site completely.

The government claims that the private sector can provide enough employment to compensate for savage cuts in public sector spending. David Cameron commented only a month ago that companies like Pfizer will spearhead job creation.

The closure is being explained largely by Pfizer's decisions to

cut costs due to the pressure of drugs coming 'off patent'. This will affect profits as Pfizer's monopoly on producing those drugs comes to an end and generic production can begin.

The patents system allows prices to be maintained at exorbitant levels. When the patents run out it becomes an excuse to reduce the workforce.

Pfizer is the main employer in the town and surrounding area. It is predicted the loss of Pfizer will result in an estimated total of 4000 jobs lost from contractors and other employers.

## WHAT WE STAND FOR

- ★ To increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour.
- ★ 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.
- ★ 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.
- ★ A 35-hour week with no loss of pay.
- ★ No to privatisation and the PFI. Renationalise all privatised services.
- ★ 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!
- ★ 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, good quality homes with low rents.
- ★ Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- ★ A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against pollution.
- ★ 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.
- ★ For a 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 Labour now and aid the building of a new workers' party!
- ★ No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops 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.

## BRANCH PROGRAMME

Branch meetings are a chance to discuss topical political issues and to get involved with party activity. Every week, we have a political discussion, after which we plan our work for the weeks and months ahead.

Meetings are every Thursday, 6.30pm at the Sunlight Centre, Gillingham.

The schedule for political discussions is as follows:

- 17 Feb, National Congress report
- 23 Feb, Trotsky and WWII
- 3 Mar, Cuba



JOIN US!

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. Our branch is active in a number of areas in Kent. Email

socialistpartykent@mail.com and we will be happy to introduce the nature of the branch and the party, and the things that we do and organise, to you. Anyone is welcome to drop into one of our weekly branch meetings in Gillingham. Meanwhile, fill out the form below to find out more about the party or to join.



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Send to: Socialist Party, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD or go to socialistparty.org.uk/main/join