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Free/Donation Issue 517

UNDER THE KNIFE

NHS PRIVATISATION: THE BIG CARVE UP

Feeling ill? Need an operation but bored with your local hospital?

The Department of Health now have a special marketing advice agency, the "Insight Unit", to help hospitals 'sell' their services. The NHS chief executive, Nigel Crisp, proclaimed that foundation trusts (SchNEWS 404) "should adopt the same marketing techniques as Tesco in their bids to win customers in the new choice-based NHS market". Get ready to be treated like a tin of cheap beans... Loyalty cards for the accident prone?

Of course it's dressed up as patient choice, but this choice comes by opening the ward doors to more and more private companies who want to make a fast buck out of your illness. The first step to privatisation is 'Choose and Book': GPs will offer patients a choice of four different 'providers' for their treatment via a desktop computer system, at least one of which has to be private. Luckily things could take a while as the IT contractors have made such a monumental screw-up of it (see SchNEWS 481) that this 'creeping privatisation', is, er, creeping very slowly.

Next up is the new NHS funding system - 'Payment by Results'. This involves hospitals being paid by primary care trusts for the work they actually do. A recent Audit Commission report said that the payment-by-results internal accounting system had turned out to be "a more complex, time-consuming and challenging process" than the NHS expected and could bring "real dangers".

Also on the list are independent sector treatment centres (ISTCs) who will be paid on average 40% more than NHS quacks, enabling them to cream off £3bn of taxpayers' money. At present the DOH does not require the same level of training for doctors working in ISTCs, and six surgeons working for the private sector on NHS cases have already been suspended for what are termed 'serious surgical errors'.

Meanwhile Primary Care Trusts continue to be privatised. Oxfordshire PCT will be the first in the country to be fully flogged off. Bidders include Group 4 (SchNEWS' firm of the week), BUPA and the US health insurance company United Health. Maybe this is their 'reward' for trying to block South African company Netcare taking over the county's eye operations. Since

Oxford already had a well-respected NHS eye hospital, the Primary Trust refused to sign the contract with Netcare until it was bullied by health supremos into doing so. A management consultants' report kept secret until after the contract was signed said the NHS hospital might be 'destabilised' by the deal, as Netcare would cream off the more simple operations the hospital traditionally supplied, starving it of money (and payment by results), training opportunities and result in 'poorer services for patients'.

However, the consultants did come up with some brilliant recommendations for sorting these problems: public sector health staff could gain experience working with Netcare for free; and the NHS should hawk surplus services in Wales and Scotland! Since the deal was done, Netcare's Medical Director, Dinesh Verma, has resigned over patient safety concerns in its mobile surgical treatment centres.

Then there's the threat of closing failing NHS hospitals that can't attract enough 'paying customers'. Not surprising really - as patients are coerced to go private, private companies then cherry-pick the easier, more lucrative work. Will we run out of patience

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For questioning authority

A founding member of a South African Residents' Association was arrested and demonised by the association's "leaders" for daring to confront them about a lack of local amenities. Unable to fob off his questions, they had him nicked. He was released the next day and the charges were dropped but not before the association described anti-authoritarians (the guy is a known anarcho) as "dangerous subversives". Said subversives have since left and formed their own group. Splitters!

before they run out of patients?

Government expenditure on the NHS is projected to rise an extra £20bn by 2008, so where's the money going? Well, the last time there was a comparable increase in spending most of it went to pay the costs of the internal market reforms. Once again, most of the new money is going to foot the bills for bringing in the private sector. Cash that should be spent on frontline care will be diverted to making and monitoring hundreds of thousands of contracts, billing for every treatment and paying for accounting, auditing, legal services and advertising - not to mention shareholders' profits. As Dr Jacky Davis a consultant radiologist in London pointed out "We are not deceived by the rhetoric about patient choice and predict

continued overleaf...

TURN THE SCREWS

PROBATION SERVICE NEXT UP FOR AUCTION

In the pile 'em high flog 'em cheap fire sale that is privatisation, everything is up for corporate grabs. Ever since Michael Howard kicked off his prison privatisation scheme back in the 1990s, corporations have been able to make a healthy profit out of the prison population (now at a record 77,000 inmates and rising). The government gets more prison places on the cheap and the likes of Group 4 and Reliance get a guaranteed subsidy per prisoner. Not only that, but the corporations get easy access to a handy source of sweatshop labour within UK Plc. Prisoners slave away for less than 30p an hour for the likes of Sainsbury's, Argos, ASDA, Debenhams, Wilkinsons and the Royal Mail.

Neo Labour is now looking to see how it can help its corporate buddies make even more cash, this time from privatising the probation service. One of the bidders to take part in a planned government 'market-test' is Group 4, infamous for the Yarlswood debacle where violent treatment by guards led to a riot which culminated in the burning of the centre to the ground. (See SchNEWS 419). And Group 4 have got plenty of experience of rehabilitation, having recovered from been fined for incompetence and inappropriate violence to prisoners on numerous occasions themselves!

(See www.copororatewatch.org.uk for more details on the ever-corruptible Group 4.)

There are 200,000 people under supervision on probation and the Probation Service also runs community service punishments (how handy, workers who have to turn up or get locked up!). But the real sting in the tail is that private companies will be advising the courts on 'appropriate' sentencing. So the prison population goes up and the longer you get the longer you'll have to work. Conflicts of interest anyone?

But we're sure the prison profiteers will do a great job as probationers, and offer the same sensitive highly qualified staff as they do in prisons. Ex-long term prisoner Mark Barnsley of the Campaign Against Prison Slavery (www.againstprisonslavery.org) told SchNEWS, "The Tories when confronted with a rise in the prison population had to introduce half-sentence remission and only put people in prison as a last resort. Labour doesn't have to do that it can just keep building more prisons. As an anarchist I don't care if I'm in a private prison or a state one but private prisons have a higher suicide rate, they're just not safe places to be. The problem is that they're employing minimum staff on minimum wages and making money from neglect."

SchNEWS OPEN DAY

We're undergoing a restructuring programme ready for privatisation. We need writers, web heads, target focussed distribution operatives etc. Reckon you can help? Contact us and book your place for our training day on Weds 26th October @ 12 noon onwards.

that patients may lose the one choice that is important - a good comprehensive local hospital. In a system where every part of the business must generate a surplus, patients will come second to profits. When the dictates of the market replace the public service ethos patients will suffer. The private sector will not support the NHS but compete with it, and NHS units and hospitals that cannot compete will close."

* Check www.keepournhspublic.com for more on fighting hospital privatisation.

DEMOCRACY OF IDEAS™

(pat. pending)

Ever since 9/11, the State has been scaring us with beard-wielding terrorist bogeymen and used the opportunity to stamp down ever harder on our hard-won freedoms of movement, assembly and action. UK plc, which currently holds the Presidency of the EU, is trying to push through something called the Intellectual Property Enforcement Directive (IPRED). 'Intellectual property' is about privatising the world of ideas and knowledge, and stopping any "unprofitable" dissemination or application of stuff outside of the control of our corporate overlords - irrespective of whether the idea may be quite simple, life-saving, or otherwise beneficial to humankind. Corporate control of ideas has been made much harder by the internet's easy transmission and spreading of information and this has got the big bosses worried.

Following on from previous failed attempts to turn even more of European intellectual life over to shareholders (see SchNEWS 490), IPRED goes even further than before by including moves to criminalise the previously civil offences of patent and copyright infringement, as well as that favourite Neo Labour Orwellian-thoughtcrime of 'incitement' to infringe. Whilst echoing anti-terrorism laws, IPRED would actually give police more powers of cross-border arrest and asset-freezing than they have for combating terrorists - well them-in-charge know where the real dangers lie...

This means that a pharmaceutical company could imprison someone for even suggesting making cheaper generic AIDS drugs and meanwhile, Sony could prosecute more parents of children downloading music or movies. The entire open-source software movement is under threat, including those attempting to provide free alternatives to near-monopolies like Microsoft, or those adapting free utilities for use by the disabled. The laws will further stack the odds against small scale innovation in favour of big corporate muscle, who can afford to routinely copyright and patent every variation of any possible idea they can think of in order to snuff out potential competition and keep those maximised profits flowing.

It's no coincidence that those lobbying hardest for this to become law are the industries who stand to profit from it.

* Keep an eye on the implications of this at www.fipr.org/intellectual.html.

* The Free Software Foundation is attempting to mount a counter-campaign. Get involved at www.fsfeurope.org/projects/ipred2

CRAP SPOOKING OF THE WEEK

A schoolkid in North Carolina got a bit more attention than he bargained for recently when he submitted his work for class recently. His teacher had set a project to take photographs that illustrated their liberties as guaranteed under the Bill of Rights. So one kid took a photo of himself standing beside a poster of George Bush, giving him the "thumbs down". He put the film into Wal-Mart's for developing, who then promptly informed the police. Suspecting subversion, the FBI paid a visit to the school, confiscated the offending photograph, grilled the teacher for a bit, then had a few patriotic words with the boy.

TOTAL WRITE OFF

Don't forget it's the **24th Anarchist Bookfair** this Saturday (22nd, 10am-6pm). It's moved to another venue, The Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London, N7, as it just keeps getting bigger! It reflects the full range of anarchist groups, publishers, and Kropotkin buffs trying to out-beard each other. Alongside all the dog-eared manifestos, yellowing pamphlets, and self-indulgent zines, there are the usual endless meetings and discussions on all aspects of er, anarchism. SchNEWS will of course be there, desperately flogging our merchandise, so come and have a chat and maybe give us a donation for our revolutionary biscuit fund. We're also chairing a talk on setting up a local newsletter, and if that's not exciting enough, we're showing the new DVD collection of SchMOVIES from this year, including the DSEi Arms Fair special.

Other facilities at the bookfair include an all-day creche and hot food. See full programme at www.anarchistbookfair.org

SPEAKERS CORNERED

And then on Sunday in the same building as the Anarchist Bookfair it's the **Freedom to Protest Conference**. For years the state has been cracking down on the right to protest (see SchNEWS issues 1-517). But whenever there have been oppressive laws, there have been those who have fought back against them, which is what the conference is all about: "Any oppressive laws can be rendered unworkable through protest, non-cooperation and defiance." Sunday 23rd 11am-5pm. Admission free/donation. www.freedomtoprotest.org.uk

* **Here's the latest bit of protest repression SchNEWS heard about:** Protesters from Survival International were thrown out of Oxford Union for "wearing offensive t-shirts". They were there to question President Mogae of Botswana (himself ironically there to talk about democracy) about the persecution of Kalahari Bushmen, who have been thrown off their ancestral land (SchNEWS 514). The protesters wore t-shirts reading 'Botswana police shoot Bushmen' - in reference to the three Bushmen shot in recent weeks. A spokesman for Survival International commented Oxford University had "learnt a few lessons from the Botswana authorities, who routinely expel anyone who dares to challenge them." www.survival-international.org

BLESS THIS HOUSE

Housmans Bookshop is 60 years old next Wednesday. London's oldest radical bookshop has since 1945 been selling books and periodicals covering politics, peace studies, current affairs, etc. as well as fiction and more.

They've got a series of events to celebrate:

* **Tuesday 25th 6.30pm:** Talk by writer Andy Worthington on the legacy of the **Battle of the Beanfield** - where the police smashed the traveller convoy going to Stonehenge in 1985 - with screening of the film about it, Operation Solstice. (Read a review of Andy's Stonehenge book in our review section - see below)

* **Wednesday 26th 6.30pm** Claire Andrews will read from her book *Legacy: Recaptured Treasures & Lasting Memories of Caribbean migrants in Britain After WW2*, part of Black History Month.

* **Thursday 27th 6.30pm:** Kate Hudson author of "CND Now More than Ever" will talk on the peace movement's past and future challenges.

* **Friday 28th 6.30pm:** Launch & celebration of the Peace Diary 2006 to celebrate Housmans 60th year of trading plus publication of 53rd edition of their Diary and World Peace Directory. www.housmans.com

* On the subject of books, SchNEWS has a new **reviews section** on our website covering anything from Chomsky to the Unabomber via Batman; the use of violence in social movements to the use of urine as a fertiliser (the endless urine/non-urine debate...)

see www.schnews.org.uk/book-reviews

SchNEWS in brief

29th October **A Climate for Change** - tackling the eco-crisis & corporate power. A meeting to "put together an action plan to halt and reverse climate change and discuss strategies to 'recycle' capitalism in favour of an economic model based on co-operation." 11am-4pm Dragon Hall, 17 Stukely Street, London, WC2 (Covent Garden/Holborn Tubes) £5/£3.50 (inc.lunch) 07871 745258 www.aworldtown.net ** **Ladyfest** is happening in galleries, clubs, coffeehouses and more all over Brighton on Oct 20th-23rd. The event is open to all, aims to give women a more visible presence in the community and will cover everything from female ejaculation to silkscreening. Look for posters about town or go to www.ladyfestbrighton.co.uk or pop along to one of their Monday meetings in the Cowley Club, London Rd at 6.30pm ** The 9/11 nutters are in town and they're flogging books too. Catch the conspiracy film **'Face the Facts: the "Truth about 9/11"** and meet former spook David Shayler. 27th October 7pm, Brixthelm Centre, Brighton £5/£3. ** **'Are You Listening Charles Clarke?'** - There will be four weekends of activity in Norwich - Home Secretary, Charles Clarke's constituency - around the themes of human rights and civil liberties. Things kick off on Friday 28th with a Civil Rights March through town starting at 8.30am at the Bandstand at Eaton Park and ending at 1pm at his office near Castlemeadow, followed the next day at noon with a demo at CC's office. For the rest of the schedule contact 01263-512049 or reforest@gn.apc.org ** 28th October 6pm Brighton **Critical Mass** -if you can't make it up to London for the big one then meet on the centre of the Level ** The campaign to save woodlands at **Titmore Lane** from destruction continues with a Vigil for the Death of Democracy, 2pm, Sat October 29 Northbrook College roundabout A259/Titmore Lane Durrington, Worthing (5 mins Goring-by-Sea station). www.protectourwoodland.fsnet.co.uk

...and finally...

Here's one we privatised earlier... Remember how PFI projects were supposed to bring us economy and efficiency? Last week action by London Underground staff brought the Northern Line to a halt. Concerned that trains weren't stopping automatically when they ran red lights, staff defied bosses and stopped the trains from moving altogether. All this highlighted how the lean efficient capitalist beasts managing our public services are just as unwieldy as the old bureaucracies but have the added bonus of being greedier. An off the rails project showed us just what capitalism with the brakes off looks like.

So who broke the brakes? Nobody knew who was responsible. Under part-privatisation one company, Tubelines is responsible for all the maintenance work - it turned train maintenance over to ALSTOM, a French multinational who in turn contracted out the upkeep of the emergency braking systems. So subcontractors subcontract ad infinitum, and each division cuts wages and shaves safety margins in search of profits. When the system started to break down the buck went round so fast it was invisible to the human eye. Even the more farcical elements of old style nationalised industry (step forward British Leyland), would find it hard to compete with this game of pin the blame on the donkey.

Privatise the railways? You might as well privatise an elephant: a PFI consortium could own the trunk, a murky offshore trust could have the ears and an American multinational the tusks. The elephant can then every now and again leave a steaming half-ton of shit behind that doesn't belong to anyone...and the minimum wage taxpayers can be given the shovels.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers... exposing your privates is always an ugly sight. Honest.

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