



NHS DIRECT ACTION

AS SchNEWS TAKES THE TEMPERATURE OF RESISTANCE TO HEALTH PRIVATISATION

On Sunday, thousands are expected to blockade Westminster Bridge in a 'sick-in' blockade spearheaded by the relentlessly organised UK Uncut. The "Block the Bridge, Block the Bill" action is taking place before the health and social care (read NHS privatisation) bill goes to the House of Lords on October 11th.

This is set to be the first mass protest against the selling-off of the NHS, despite the bill having gone through the Commons at the beginning of last month. Why has it taken us so long? Were we too busy watching the eurozone collapse, travellers not getting evicted and hoodlums nicking shit from JD Sports?

Although this is the first large-scale act of civil disobedience, that's not to say the bill's had a smooth running so far. In fact, it's been slammed from all directions – and its not hard to see why. There's yet to be one compelling argument made for the whole-scale organisational changes; they are totally unpopular with the public; they're vehemently and vocally opposed from within the medical establishment; and they've got no redeeming features in terms of quality of care or efficiency.

Just a few days ago, the BMA (British Medical Association) again called for the bill to be scrapped, stating their fears that many of the UK's hospitals would close under the new laws. The government would effectively lose responsibility for providing a universal health service.

A recent study in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine showed that the NHS is the most efficient health service in the world in terms of lives saved per pound. But performance doesn't matter when a heady mix of money-making potential and neo-con ideology rules. "The NHS is a sixty year mistake" said tory MEP Daniel Hannan, speaking on Fox News in 2009. In the same year MP Oliver Letwin warned: "The NHS will not exist within five years of a Conservative victory".

That's not to say that the NHS could continue on its merry way as it currently stands given our semi-bust financial position: something had to give. We have a growing, ageing population, absorbing environmental health-harming chemicals over the course of several decades, and selfishly staying alive longer with the help of newly developed expensive drugs. Therefore the demand for - and the cost of - the NHS has risen exponentially.

It's with the NHS is under such pressure, these changes couldn't come at a worse time. The abolition of the current service commissioning bodies, Primary Care Trusts, which the government portrays as useless bureaucracy – will actually rid the organisation of experienced managers at the time when the whole system is being pushed at breakneck speed into total organisational chaos. Chaos might be desirable at a punk gig, but not in a hospital. If the reforms are bulldozed through, there's a real risk of big care failures.

And even if, by magic, the transition to G.P-led commissioning was as smooth as a pre-surgery

shave, then the savings probably wouldn't match the hype. Because most G.Ps have no interest in being part of commissioning 'consortia' (even though the word makes them sound all important, like), so it's private companies waiting in the wings to lap up the taxpayer dosh to provide the admin/managerial support stuff they don't want to do.

Tory health minister Andrew Lansley's answer to the cost conundrum, a continuation of Blair and Major before him, is that competition – in the form of outsourcing to the private sector - will make all service providers push down costs as much as possible, so the whole 'universal health care' ideal will be cheaper.

What is missing from the Big Idea is a simple understanding of the capitalist dynamic. To cut costs, several techniques are generally employed. One is cutting wages, and the number of people on the pay roll, as much as you can. No wonder docs and nurses are pissed off – and should it happen, they'll have one hell of a lot less clout to organise as a workforce for their rights when they've been divided into endless private company employees, rather than organising en masse when they're all directly employed by the government. Another is to decrease the quality of services. And don't forget the loss of a central body to negotiate demand lower supply prices in return for higher volume deals. Outsourcing to the private sector just means they'll do a worse job, using lower resources, but costing the same or more as they improve the health of their shareholders' wallets.

The government has been glossing over the evidence that privatisation tends to result in falling standards and extra costs - like in the US, which has the most inefficient system in the world – while emphasising "choice" and "patient empowerment". But when you need a broken leg plastered or a dose of chemotherapy, not many people complain that they want more 'choice' or 'empowerment' in where they get it from. They just want the first specialist they meet to help them. Yet this flimsy rhetoric constitutes the entire propaganda with which the Tories are trying to smash a cornerstone of the welfare state. The other motive – private profit - was let slip by Lord Howe when he said the Bill represented 'huge opportunities' for private companies.

Yep, the private health lobby has been busy bribing its way into position to attack our national treasure for years. Back in March, Corporate Watch published a report on the kind of shady characters and mutually-beneficial arrangements that form the backdrop of the NHS reform. To give just a snapshot, Andrew Lansley received funding from the wife of John Nash, former chairman of Care UK, a company that already operates various NHS clinics and treatment centres around the country. Lord Carter, head of the NHS's Competition and Cooperation Panel, is an advisor to Warburg Pincus International Ltd, a private equity firm with 'sig-

nificant investments' in the healthcare industry.

And are these companies going to at least provide half-decent frontline services, while they skim tax money into shareholder bank accounts? As an example, somewhere between ten and twenty hospitals have been earmarked for takeover by German company Helios. The no2stories blog has dug up some interesting info about Helios' operations in Germany: In June, the company's clinics were raided by 150 cops. Why? They were under suspicion of allowing under-qualified assistant doctors to conduct medical investigations, then passing them off as being done by chief medics, for the last three years. Then there's the overall patient satisfaction at Helios hospitals - recorded as averaging 3 out of 6 on public feedback websites, with at least four major clinics scoring a measly 2 out of 6. Then there's the way they've set up private clinics within their public clinics, to side-step statutory charging guidelines and rip off the ill and vulnerable that little bit more.

Need any more reasons to hit the streets of London on Sunday? See www.ukuncut.org.uk

WELLING UP

On Monday all nine defendants in the second Welling Blood&Honour case were found not guilty of conspiracy to violent disorder. The first trial saw seven guilty verdicts and six defendants sent down (see SchNEWS 779).

The charge related to fight between anti-fascists and Blood&Honour skinheads on Welling train station platform in March 2009. The German fash were in the area to attend a neo nazi gig in a local pub. Anti-fascists had counter mobilised. The actual confrontation was brief and to the point – the two boneheads were attacked by a small group and run along the length of the platform. This minor incident – neither of the fash were hospitalized and neither made a statement - was seized by the police and CPS as a chance to put militant anti-fascism out of action.

Altogether 23 arrests were made in a series of dawn raids across the country – huge amounts of evidence was seized, some of it anti-fascist propaganda, but most of it relating to social interactions. The defendants in the first trial had nearly 4,500 pages of evidence presented against them – histories of text messages, e-mails facebook postings etc. This was intended to be the backbone of the evidence for a 'conspiracy'.

In the end the prosecution in both cases relied heavily on CCTV from the station platform, and of the defendants in the few hours before and little else - meaning that the raids had effectively been a huge fishing expedition.

Twenty-three arrests were made – three had their charges dropped before the case went to court but the others had to wait for 2 ½ years on bail. SchNEWS spoke to one defendant: "It was mental in there when we got the verdicts, everyone was jumping around and screaming – obviously it's a huge relief but now our job is to support the other guys who are inside."

*www.antifascistprisonersupportuk.wordpress.com

ANGEL DELIGHT

Frustrated by their piss-poor showing in Tower Hamlets (see SchNEWS 787) the EDL are sending in their women to see if they can do a better job.

The so-called Angels division of the Tommy Robinson personality cult are marching to Downing St on October 8th at 12 p.m. Waiting for them will be a women-led UAF counter demo (and no doubt the usual roaming autonomous anti-fascists).

As a footnote, four EDLers have just been sent down after a vicious attack on the Redbridge Islamic centre in March this year. The quartet, all under twenty years old, were all convicted of violent disorder and three received 3½ year sentences.

SQUAT A WASTE OF TIME

The government's consultation on squatting ended on Wednesday (5th), so if you were planning on appealing to Tory government's more compassionate side it's too late – not that you would have had much luck anyway.

There was a late push from a number of squatting groups to try and get responses from those more sympathetic to the movement, but given the government's attitude to squatters (the consultation was aimed at "victim[s] of squatting") they are unlikely to pay much attention. The process was a box ticking exercise from a government who have already vowed to "end squatters rights".

Meanwhile a new report from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University found that "the popular characterisation of squatters bears little resemblance to reality... squatting and homelessness are inextricably linked" and that "criminalising squatting will result in the criminalisation of homeless people".

The report recommended not creating new offences, but instead devoting research and assistance towards those who are forced to squat. Not that any of this has had any effect on Grant Shapps, Crispin Blunt or Mike Weatherly the leading cheerleaders of the anti-squat lynch mob.

All three were the focus of criticism in a letter to the *Grauniad* on 25th September signed by a 160 lawyers. The thrust of their argument is that the case for a new squatting law is based upon lies in the mainstream press, and that misleading statements from the government was adding to this. They want ministers to "correct any statements they have made which are likely to have confused the public" in order to allow an "informed factual discussion rather than a response based on sensationalist misrepresentation".

Obviously that sort of thing wouldn't appeal to Mike Weatherly's foamy mouthed constituents so he got his response in the next day. Unfortunately, he completely ignored most of the points in the lawyers' letter and instead called them "out of touch" and suggested they were acting out of self interest. This view was echoed by Grant Shapps who Tweeted - "These lawyers are sadly out of touch for believing that taking "a few days" to clear squatters is a reasonable outcome!", when asked if he knew that squatting a home was already a criminal offence, there was silence.

It is to this background of reasoned debate being shutdown with populist soundbites that any new law will be announced, though with National Union of Students, Unite and others talking about opposing the legislation, they might not get it all their own way.

* For more see <http://squashcampaign.org> <http://nearlylegal.co.uk> & <http://squatter.org.uk>.

CORE VALUES

A quiet country road in Somerset was the setting for a 250 strong blockade this week as activists gathered to oppose the construction of Hinkley C - the first new nuclear power station to be built in the UK for over twenty years, part of government plans for up to ten in total. The project is backed by French energy corporation EDF.

Protesters from as far afield as France and Belgium made the journey on Monday (3rd) to join local resistance to EDF's planned facility. A minimal police presence with a hands off approach and no sign of works traffic made for a relaxed atmosphere. Seize the Day and other musicians kept people entertained on the sound system and speeches were heard from local residents and activist groups.

At noon, the demonstrators held a minute's silence for the victims of the Fukushima fallout, and then released 206 helium balloons, one for each day since the disaster. Earlier in the week a camp four miles away from the blockade site had been set up with workshops and speakers, and on Saturday (1st) the camp marched from EDF's offices in Bridgwater around the town.

The reactor planned for Hinkley C is based on an untested design. It is the third of its type under construction, and the other two in Finland and France are way over budget and behind schedule so are not yet operational. The future of both of these facilities is uncertain as building contractors Arriva and EDF wrangle in court over the extra costs in Finland, and France's nuclear build programme hangs in the balance until after their upcoming general election.

For this reason, and due to the relative lack of a strong anti-nuclear movement in the UK, EDF is willing to pour money into Hinkley, and even risk losing money, as long as the end result is a functioning reactor which will sell the design to other countries.

As one protester commented on the day, "Today is symbolic. This is the beginning of a new movement: we need to be stronger and more committed if we are going to fight this. Last year there were seven people on a blockade here, today there are 250. We need to build up a momentum of thousands, and then we have a real chance of convincing the government there is no future in nuclear."

* www.stophinkley.org

FACTORY FINISH?

Long running Bristol squat and social centre, the Factory is facing eviction. Situated on the corner of Cave Street and Portland Square, the venue has been occupied for a year and a half and according to the collective is 'a space for free activities, creativity and political discussion.'

Now the PG Group – a development company with strong links to the Catholic church are seeking an eviction. They plan to turn it into luxury flats, offices, a cafe, an art gallery and a small health centre.

The collective made this statement "We are squatting this building. We do not legally own it. However, we believe that buildings should belong to the people who use them and open them up for others to use together, not to those who only want to make money off them. Laws exist to protect the interests of the rich and keep the rest of us shut out. That is why, if we have to, we will defy them. We know that this means that we are likely to face violent eviction but we believe that resistance is essential. We have to take a stand."

* For more <http://freefactory.wordpress.com>

FIRST WE TAKE MANHATTAN

It all started back on the 17th of September when a few dozen protesters tried to pitch tents outside the New York Stock Exchange. When they were blocked by police, hundreds camped out opposite the NYSE to take their anti-capitalist message to the belly of the beast..

With Wall St under real attack at last, read SchNEWS' take on the mass activism happening 'over the pond' - online only at www.schnews.org.uk

COS I'M WORTHING IT

ANGRY Sussex people are to protest outside Tory party offices against changes to planning rules that would give property developers free rein.

They are gathering outside the Conservative HQ in Worthing at 2pm on Saturday October 15 in an event organised by Hands Off Our Sussex Countryside with the backing of the Save Our Sussex Alliance, which includes groups such as Keep Southwater Green, Save Billingshurst, Don't Overdevelop Durrington and the Worthing Downlanders.

Said a spokesman: "Throughout its time in opposition, the Conservative Party gave the impression of opposing the tide of tarmac threatening our natural heritage and even won votes on the basis that it would be giving local communities the right to reject unwanted development.

"Now, however, it is aiming to introduce a presumption in favour of development, making it virtually impossible for local councils, let alone local people, to have any chance of halting unwanted sprawl.

"This is nothing but a charter for property developers to help themselves to our countryside and makes a mockery of any idea of democracy.

"We urge one and all to come and support us - and, of course, to let their friends and family know about the event."

* www.handsoffoursussexcountryside.blogspot.com & www.saveoursussex.com

PARTY & PROTEST
For events listings updated weekly see
www.schnews.org.uk/pap

...and finally...

Hilarity this week as Vlad 'the impaler' Putin's most recent attempt to portray himself as Rambo, John Wayne and Indiana Jones all rolled into one, was exposed as a fake.

After having previously been seen riding shirtless on a polar bear and leather-clad, judo-throwing hell's angels (or something like that), in August video footage was released showing action hero Putin emerging from a scuba dive holding two fragments of what were described as ancient Greek jars, declaring: "It's my trophy."

But as a spokesman has now had to admit, the treasures had actually been placed there by archaeologists keen to please Russia's top godfather.

Nonetheless, it is Putin who's probably laughing loudest. PR job done, he can return to pissing on the Russian constitution, and 'serve' as President again in a cosy stich up 'election' next year. And no dissent or opposition to his iron-rule grip over the resources and power in one of the world's biggest, naturally rich countries is tolerated. Nice work if you can get it, comrade!

Disclaimer

SchNEWS advises all readers, if you're gonna get sick, do it sooner rather than later. Honest.

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