

# 'What we heard'

# Stroud marches against 'private sharks' killing the NHS

**Chris Moore**  
Gloucestershire Socialist Party

Leafleting for the Jarrow to London Youth March for Jobs the other morning I met a very sympathetic PCS member. The first thing she said was: "I'm definitely going out on the 30th".

She was due to retire in a few years and now faces having to work longer and pay more while getting less for her retirement. But she also made the point that in her section of the civil service she couldn't think of one worker who was less than 35 years old. Her point was that "through no fault of their own" older workers are becoming "job-hoggers" while young people can't get a job. "Why shouldn't people be able to retire and live reasonably after a lifetime of work?"

Exactly!  
**Emma Smith**  
Walthamstow Socialist Party

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At a recent stall outside an FE college where we were petitioning against £9,000 university fees and for the restoration of Education Maintenance Allowance, many of the students showed their support for the 30 November public sector strike.

Comments from the students included "I'm ready for strikes, bring it on!" and "I want to do protests, hold banners, the lot".

**Nick Hart**  
Birmingham Socialist Party

Email 'what you heard' to editors@socialistparty.org.uk or text 07432 593 149

To the chants of: 'We're sick of Con-Dem lies, they said they wouldn't privatise'; 'Whose NHS? Our NHS'; and 'Join the union, join the fight, support the public sector strike'; 500 people marched through Stroud, Gloucestershire on Saturday 24 September demanding a publicly owned NHS.

Private health companies like Care UK, Bondcare Medical Services, Assura Medical and many more are circling the NHS like sharks smelling blood, as the Con-Dem government attempts to rip our health service apart.

The management of NHS Gloucestershire is facing rising opposition from staff and the public across the county against plans to transfer 4,000 staff, nine community hospitals and many services to a Social Enterprise Trust (SET) or Community Interest Company (CIC). It is claimed that £1 shares will mean more staff involvement, that profits will be reinvested and that services won't change.

But on 19 September a flagship social enterprise, Central Surrey Health, set up in 2006 and a Big Society award winner in 2010, lost out when competing for the first time against other bidders for serv-

ice contracts. Health visiting, eight community hospitals, prison health care and other Surrey services worth £90 million a year will now be run by the private company Assura Medical, 75% owned by Virgin Group.

Our NHS is also under threat of destruction from the Health and Social Care Bill, which removes all barriers to privatisation. It ends the Health Secretary's legal duty to deliver comprehensive care to patients.

Health care company Chilvers-McCrea has just stopped providing GP services in Southend because it's not making enough money. Care UK and Assura Medical have the largest number of contracts to run large health centres. But Assura is selling off its primary care business to Virgin Healthcare because it failed to produce enough profit. Our NHS has never been more at risk.

The demonstration was addressed by Stroud's former Labour MP, opposing 'social enterprise', but it was his government that championed the policy. Patricia Hewitt, when health secretary in 2006, said that social enterprises could create wealth and employment and play a greater role in public services.

Labour also encouraged private Independent Treatment Centres, brought in Private Finance Initiatives that mean we're paying £50 billion for £11 billion worth of build-



A protest in Surrey where community health care has been privatised  
photo North Surrey SP

ings, and set up Foundation Trusts that will suck in private patients and funding.

Stroud Against Cuts has also launched legal action to hold up NHS services transferring to a CIC on 1 October. This can give more time to organise an effective campaign involving trade unions and anti-cuts groups. NHS staff in Gloucestershire have never been balloted about the transfer.

When Unison in eastern region faced a similar situation they or-

ganised protests and campaigned to force a ballot which rejected SETs. In Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and South Bedfordshire, health trade unions successfully campaigned against SETs.

A national demonstration and coordinated industrial action to defend the NHS is long overdue. A determined campaign, including a 24-hour public sector strike, is desperately needed to stop the private sharks killing our NHS and public services.

# Salford says: Save Lancaster House!

**A Save Lancaster House campaigner**

Salford City Council intends to withdraw funding for Lancaster House - a training and resettlement centre which provides temporary accommodation for 38 single men - on 30 September 2011. If this goes ahead Lancaster House would become

nothing more than a B&B.

Re-housing the residents without support before they are ready for the transition to independent living could lead to serious repercussions as these men all have significant and complex needs, including some with mental health disabilities and others with physical disabilities.

David Allum, chair of the resi-

dents' peer group, made an eleventh hour plea to Salford council during their council meeting, only for this to fall on deaf ears.

The councillor concerned refused to answer David's question as to what would happen to him and his fellow residents on 30 September, citing 'contractual reasons' for not responding.

The irony is that a Salvation Army chaplain led the opening council meeting prayers in which she said that 'we pray that we are able to support the vulnerable'.

In recent weeks Save Lancaster House campaigners have held protests, including a candlelit vigil, and lobbied Salford councillors. They haven't heard the last of us yet!

# Stop coastguard cuts!

**Sean Brogan**  
Exeter Socialist Party

As part of the Con-Dem coalition's 'austerity' programme under the guise of 'modernisation', Brixham Coastguard Station - along with eight others - faces closure.

These closures, due to commence in three years, will endanger life not only at sea but on the cliffs and inlets.

Fishing is a dangerous occupation and accidents at sea require an immediate response.

At a public meeting hosted by local councils, the case against these measures was put and well received by the audience.

But unfortunately no one was allowed to contribute from the floor except 'important' people! The top table included a member of the PCS union, which represents coastguards, but also local Tory MPs and an ex-Labour Party council member.

Having Tories and Lib Dems present was like asking Dracula to tie a tourniquet to a wound. These are the same people who are shredding our NHS. Those who are rescued by coastguards will have to have second-rate hospital treatment if these cuts are not defeated.

This struggle will only be won, not by inviting the butchers to tea, but by linking up the trade unions, local communities and building anti-cuts alliances.

# Greenwich Unite takes fight to cuts councillors



Unite union members from across Greenwich took the fight against the cuts to the south London borough's council. An angry lobby demanded that the council reverse its plans to destroy local communities through a brutal cuts programme. Staff and students from closure-threatened Blackheath Bluecoats School spoke passionately against the proposal to shut the school. Workers and volunteers from Greenwich Law Centre protested against the funding cut that will lead to the closure of the centre. Library workers protested against the threat of being transferred out to a Trust. A mass lobby of the full council is now being prepared for 26 October.  
text Onay Kasab photo Greenwich SP

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# SOCIALIST PARTY FIGHTING FUND

	£ target	£ received	July-September 2011	Deadline: 7 October
North West	1,200	2,710	██████████	██████████
Eastern	1,200	1,426	██████████	██████████
Wales	2,300	2,151	██████████	██████████
West Midlands	2,100	1,576	██████████	██████████
Yorkshire	2,900	1,723	██████████	██████████
East Midlands	1,550	763	██████████	██████████
Southern	1,200	549	██████████	██████████
South West	1,400	626	██████████	██████████
South East	1,000	436	██████████	██████████
Northern	600	186	██████████	██████████
London	6,100	1,559	██████████	██████████
England & Wales	3,450	248	██████████	██████████
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25,000</b>	<b>13,958</b>	██████████	██████████