



Lewisham

Issue 7 (30 January 2013)

Hospital Worker

A Workers' Liberty healthworkers' bulletin

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The biggest march in NHS history



By Jill Mountford, Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign organising committee (personal capacity)

With as many as 25,000 people marching, the 26 January demonstration in Lewisham was the biggest local demonstration in defence of the NHS and against hospital closures anywhere in Britain at any time.

As big as many national demos, it was a tremendous show of anger and opposition to the threat of closure of Lewisham's A & E and Maternity Unit. For many marching it was also about the defence of the NHS as a whole and against PFI.

As Trusts across the country face massive unaffordable loan repayments through PFI agreements, Lewisham Hospital and the South London Health Trust (SLHT) has become a test case for the government. Each year, SLHT (of which Lewisham Hospital is not a part) pays out £69 million in PFI repayments and slips a further £65 million into debt. Matthew Kershaw, the Trust Special Administrator, recommends Lewisham Hospital close its A & E and Maternity Unit and sell off 60% of its land to help resolve SLHT's financial crisis. The far more simple and just solution would be to cancel all PFI debts. Take all hospitals and health trusts saddled with these outrageously unjust debts out of hock to the rich.

Jeremy Hunt will announce his decision either Thursday this week (31 January) or next Tuesday (5 February). The campaign is calling for people to converge on Lewisham Hospital at 6pm on the day of the announcement. We want as many people as possible outside the hospital regardless of what Hunt decides.

From the government's point of view it makes sense to knock this movement on the head now. The Tories know the Lewisham spark must be snuffed, or it could become a fire across the country.

The rumour is Hunt will put off making the decision in favour of a London-wide NHS consultation that will consider and recommend reconfiguring services across the capital. If the Kershaw's "consultation report" cost £5–6 million, a London-wide consultation is set to cost the taxpayer tens of millions of pounds and will no doubt come up with a longer list of hospitals that should close and services that should be cut.

Hunt should not be allowed to dissipate the anger and energy, even if he gives us some kind of reprieve. We should continue to fight in Lewisham, and many in the campaign feel we also have a useful role to play in helping campaigns elsewhere sharing our experiences and ideas.

So far, the campaign is very much community based, bringing together people from all over Lewisham. The campaign is made up of many people who are involved in political groups and trade unions and have a long campaigning history, as well as many others who are coming into activism for the first time.

The strength of the campaign is in people's willingness to stand shoulder to shoulder and work together to do what is necessary to help the movement grow and win.

Where the campaign is weak so far is amongst the hospital workers themselves. Last week there was a significant step forward when more than 40 hospital workers attended a meeting on the site and discussed, amongst other things, the position of the hospital workers' unions and building the campaign within the hospital.

The next stage of the fight to save the hospital will need to involve hospital workers in much greater numbers if we are to stop the closure of the A & E and the Maternity Unit. Industrial action of some kind will be essential.

Winning the arguments for a work-in — where workers refuse to run down services, and instead run the hospital themselves in the interests of patients, the community, and staff — is a necessity if we are to turn the tide and push back the government's agenda for the NHS.

LHW provides a forum for staff at the hospital to tell their stories and air their views. If you have a story to tell or an opinion to share then get in touch. The bulletin is edited by healthcare professionals and we will ensure confidentiality is upheld.



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How to mobilise 25,000

25,000 people did not gather and march spontaneously. The Save Lewisham Hospital campaign mobilised them through an impressive combination of creative activism and dogged, routine, hard work, week after week since Matthew Kershaw made his draft recommendations public back in October 2012.

To mobilise 25,000 people on the streets, 130,000 campaign leaflets were produced and distributed in an organised way mainly across the borough, but also in neighbouring boroughs and beyond around other parts of London. Regular weekly stalls were held in high streets in freezing cold temperatures, some for 6 hour stints, with campaigners talking to the public about the threat of closure, petitioning people, standing outside school gates talking to parents signing them up to help with the campaign, asking them what they can do to help build the fightback to Save Lewisham Hospital.

Saturday's magnificent march was built through other actions the campaign has organised — the march back in November, 2012 with more than 10,000 people; the vigil outside the hospital on the coldest night of the year with 300 people protesting; the 300 strong protest outside Gold-

smiths College earlier in January when the BBC filmed Question Time; the double decker bus that travelled around neighbouring boroughs of the South London Health Trust mobilising support and showing solidarity; the flash mob of mums and children born in Lewisham

Hospital protesting outside the Ministry of Health; speaking at meetings around the borough; leafleting outside Millwall and Charlton football clubs during home games, getting the clubs on side to the extent that Millwall rearrange a match so as not to clash with the march, and their team wear shirts saying Save Lewisham Hospital; all of these, and other actions too, are what built the 25,000-strong demonstration last week.

It is a broad campaign that brings together a lot of talented and driven people who have so far managed to handle their political differences without damaging the campaign. We have to continue to do this if we are fight and win.



Greek healthworkers strike

Austerity in Greece, like in Britain, is being used as an excuse to privatise their health service and shut down hospitals. Greek healthworkers are fighting back.

A 24-hour nationwide strike and rally in Athens has been called for Thursday 31 January by healthworkers' unions.

Doctors, nurses, and hospital staff are joining forces in order to confront austerity policies.

The strike follows many mobilisations of hospital workers in recent months; action which have successfully prevented closures and mergers under government "restructuring" plans.

Doctors' union OENGE has said: "The Health Ministry is keen to show a reduction in hospital beds by 11,000 and

merging or closing 660 departments and clinics. The cut in the state budget for 'doctors on call' by €45 million is outrageous and will exacerbate the precarious conditions of emergency services".

The strike needs to be organised with general meetings, and debates in all hospitals.

Its success will pave the way for escalation of the struggle and development of multiple form of actions such as strikes, sit-ins, work-ins, demonstrations in coordination with other workers whose jobs are threatened, as well as with local neighbourhood assemblies and neighbourhood community movements.

STOP PRESS: Rally outside on the hospital at 6pm on the day of Hunt's announcement

The content of the event will be decided by the content of the announcement...