



Workers' Liberty

# Unison Health Bulletin

Produced by healthworkers in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty

[www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org) • [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) • 0207 394 8923

## Organise to save the NHS!



**All of us that work within the NHS know that the Tories are in the process of destroying the system that has provided free healthcare for all at the point of need since 1948.**

As the Tories' Health and Social Care Act comes into force, the publication of the section 75 regulations has exposed that the Tory agenda is for complete fragmentation and large-scale privatisation.

Dr Mark Porter, the new chair of the British Medical Association's council, has said that current policy is "morally wrong" and will threaten people's health or lives because they will no longer be able to get treatment. Jeremy Hunt has made it clear he favours an insurance based system, which we know from the USA means access to healthcare dependant on wealth.

The Tories plan £20 billion cuts by 2014-5, and £50 billion by 2019-20. These cuts are grinding down workers through increased workloads, attacks on our conditions, and low pay. The morale in our workplaces has never been worse. The background to the conference this week is grim.

But while we are in the conference hall this week, we should remember that we are not isolated. In the past few months hundreds of thousands have mobilised to save the NHS. In response to the section 75 regulations the "38 Degrees" website managed to collect 200,000 signatures in a matter of days; in Leeds over 600,000 people signed a peti-

tion to defend their children's heart surgery; Londoners have protested in thousands against hospital cuts at the Whittington and in Lewisham. We should be drawing on the strength of these community campaigns to organise union action against attacks on us and the services we work in.

Our union should be leading this fight, giving national focus and confidence to branches, activists and members. Instead, we are still being offered a strategy of keeping our heads down, working with trusts to manage cuts and wait for a Labour government.

No doubt there will be much fighting talk this week, but actions speak louder than words — when it came to defending our pensions our leadership let our campaign drift into failure. With Agenda for Change, the "strategy" has been to make concessions. The approach to recruitment has returned to promoting the union as individual insurance.

We cannot wait for a Labour government. We need to fight now to save the NHS and our jobs. In places where branches have given a lead, like at Mid Yorkshire, members have risen to do just that. We need to be clear we are an independent voice for our members — in opposition to the government and our employers.

**Organising members to fight for their jobs and conditions is the only hope for future of our union and the NHS.**

**Workers' Liberty is a revolutionary socialist organisation active in the British labour movement, fighting for a working-class alternative to capitalism and Stalinism based on common ownership and democracy.**

**This bulletin was produced by Workers' Liberty members who work in the health service. In Unison we fight for greater grassroots control, more democracy in the union, and radical industrial strategies. To get in touch with us at Unison Health Conference, ring Ali on 07886 399683. To find out more about our ideas, visit our website at [workersliberty.org](http://workersliberty.org)**

# The fight to save Lewisham Hospital

**Conference fringe meeting:  
Monday (22 April), 5:30pm at  
the Campanile Hotel (opposite  
conference venue)**

**Speakers include a Lewisham Hospital  
nurse  
Organised by the *Healthworker* paper**



The NHS is being battered. All over the country, A&Es and whole hospitals are under threat of closure. In Lewisham a community campaign has grown up against these attacks, including the biggest demonstration this country has ever had in defence of a hospital. This report by a Lewisham nurse points to the lessons union activists can learn but also asks serious questions about how the leadership of Unison is relating to genuine active community campaigns.

**This story began last summer when the neighbouring trust, the South London Healthcare Trust, went into administration and was taken over by the Trust Special Administrator (TSA).**

The trust was “overspending” by £1.3m per week — understandable considering PFI charges of over £69m per year.

The TSA proposals, which have now been accepted almost entirely unamended by Jeremy Hunt, leave Lewisham as the major loser, without an A&E or any of its acute services. There’d be a (not very) Urgent Care centre (think minors), with a ward attached for non-acute admissions (?), there’d be a midwife-led birthing unit, with no obstetrics or other acute paediatric backup, and then there’d be an “elective surgery” centre which will cater only for those without significant comorbidities — again without any acute services to back them up.

Lewisham is a district general hospital; we don’t have a lot of specialist patients coming through our doors. We deal with the common-or-garden complaints, and deal with the vast majority in our basic but comprehensive set of secondary services. So, without our A&E and related acute services most of our hospital will shut down. We are in a densely populated and deprived area, and many of our staff live nearby and use the services themselves.

In October 2012, the new campaign, “Save Lewisham Hospital”, called a meeting. We filled the biggest hall in the

hospital, and two overflow rooms, and frustrated crowds gathered outside of those unable to get in. Over a thousand people tried to attend. A demo in November attracted 10,000 on one of the coldest rainiest days of the winter; that was before our record-breaking, 25,000 strong, demo in January. Since then, we’ve had up to 150 mothers with babies demonstrating outside the Department of Health, and pensioners marched through Lewisham to gather outside the hospital with posters pinned to their shopping trolleys.

We’ve had over 80 people at our organising meetings, and even now, after all these months and Hunt’s “irreversible” decision to close us down, 40-50 people gather each fortnight to discuss the practicalities of the campaign. We’ve got another public meeting planned, a demonstration in Hunt’s constituency, and a “People’s Commission” to examine all the evidence that 18 lawyers and a renowned QC have signed up to administrate. There are two separate judicial reviews into the decision to reduce services at Lewisham, by the campaign, and by the local council.

Unfortunately what we’ve not had is a penny of support from the affected Unison branch in the hospital. The local government branch have made sizable donations, and Unite has given money and equipment for every major event. But Unison in the hospital has seemed to want to dampen down this campaign. The branch has paid for its own flags and banners to take on the demonstrations, but has done nothing to build the campaign. The events have been good enough to advertise at, but not good enough to support, apparently.

The community campaign in Lewisham continues to do great work in boosting the morale and confidence of staff, keeping up public awareness, and keeping up pressure on the government. In the end if community pressure fails, it will be down to those of us working in the NHS who form the last line of defence, and we need effective union organisation to do this. This organisation needs to be built in alliance with the community campaign.

This has been the most vibrant campaign I have ever been involved in. It has inspired me, and I hope it can inspire others.

**If you are involved in a local campaign to defend the NHS, and you’d like to share your experiences, or learn from ours then please do get in touch. The website for the campaign is [savelewishamhospital.com](http://savelewishamhospital.com)**

# Agenda for Change: Censor the SGE and build a national campaign



**In response to the trend of Trusts threatening Agenda for Change, particularly the South West “cartel”, Unison activists across the country have been taking part in training to defend our national terms and conditions.**

We’ve been told that preparing ourselves to fight for Agenda for Change is one of our organising priorities. In Mid Yorkshire, they’ve gone beyond “preparation”. Members there are courageously fighting downbanding with strikes, and building their union as a result.

However, despite this local work the union nationally has led negotiations to give away sections of AfC. The argument has been that if we work with cost cutting employers to reduce the wage bill they might be nice and preserve a national system. If we can hang onto some husk of AfC until the next election then hopefully Labour will get into power and save us.

The changes were agreed without securing any guarantees from employers and there have been no clear commitments from Labour. Less than a week after Unison agreed the package, Chris Hopson, head of the

bosses’ federation Foundation Trust Network, representing 200 NHS employers, said it was “time to consider setting pay regionally or on a trust-by-trust basis.”

As usual there was talk of a widespread consultation with members before agreeing this deal. We all know that in reality few members were truly consulted. It would be surprising if 1% of the membership understood what was going on — let alone had enough information to make an informed decision. The option of a national campaign in defence of Agenda for Change wasn’t even included in the options for debate.

Nobody will pretend that fighting the current attacks is easy or that our union is in a healthy state to face the current onslaught, but concession bargaining is not the way to build our strength. It can only send a clear signal to the employer that we are weak and unprepared to fight and giving way without a fight can only demoralise our members.

**Let’s take the opportunity this week to turn this situation around by supporting the motions calling for a national organising strategy and effective national action.**

## **Demand Labour restore the NHS!**

**Last year delegates at Labour Party conference voted through a radical health policy that committed Labour to restoring the NHS following the Tory demolition project.**

This came after the success of the lobby organised by the NHS Unity Network, Unite, the Labour Representation Committee, Keep Our NHS Public and many CLPs, union branches and local campaigns. Labour policy now calls for a clear commitment to repealing the Tories’ Health and Social Care Act, reversing privatisation and marketisation, restoring the NHS as a public service as well as reversing some New Labour policies, such as PFI.

But this paper policy will not bind a future Labour government. Labour will not rebuild the NHS on its founding principles without a fight. Despite a commitment to repeal the HSC Act Andy Burnham has said that a major NHS reorganisation would not be on the agenda. Labour need to clearly break from the New

Labour years of ISTCs, PFI and the cosy relationship with the private sector. The market cannot be driven out of healthcare without huge reorganisation.

**For a model motion see [tinyurl.com/lpmodelmotion](http://tinyurl.com/lpmodelmotion)**

## **Organise to fight the pay freeze**

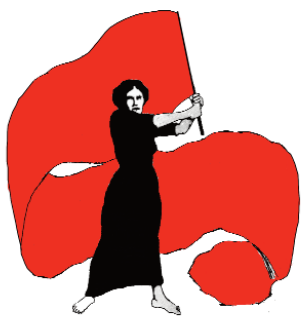
Low pay is becoming an increasing issue for health workers and as many of the motions this week say the time has come to mobilise to end the pay freeze.

The price of the economic crisis is being paid for by workers while the rich maintain their wealth and extend their capacity for profit making into the public services.

We need an organising campaign that exposes the reality of the bosses’ austerity measures, reaches out to and involves members and provides a long term winnable strategy to defeat the Tories, not just a one off day of action or reliance on waiting for a Labour government.

Organising workplace meetings, opening up our branches to member involvement and activists linking up with other trade unionists and workers taking action is the place to start.





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## Fight for a workers' government

**We live in a world where around 8% of the world's population own 85% of the world's wealth. That leaves the other 92% of us scrabbling over the remaining 15%.**

The income of 99.9% of the world's population could double and we would still be living in an extremely unequal world. These figures show that austerity policies, which many mainstream economists like the *Financial Times'* Martin Woolf believe is prolonging the crisis, are entirely unnecessary.

A big part of the ruling class's wealth is held as "means of production" — factories, machines, transport, office blocks, mines. Their property rights to these means of production allows them to amass their fortunes. This is the key to the vast inequality.

The workers' movements of the past were successful in winning industrial and political battles to take much of these means of production into common ownership. This trend is now reversed. Even our hospitals are privately owned; soon they will also be run for profit.

Another portion of the wealth of the rich is held as credit derivatives, pieces of paper entitling them to future profit. Taken together the global value of these bits of paper is four times world gross domestic product. We're all in debt to this small minority who control not only surplus value in the here and now, but also future surplus value for decades to come.

All the wealth we produce through work is controlled by this small minority. They keep us living on the bare minimum.

On a local level we have become used to negotiating within the limits set by management's budget. If cuts are being made we do our best to avoid compulsory redundancy but rarely do we challenge the cuts agenda with serious action. This is even more true now that the commissioners set the budget. This approach is also used on a national level as we saw with the pensions dispute. The bosses and their representatives announce the budget and our negotiators work out the details. There is a pessimism about our ability to organise industrial action on a scale that will push through the financial limits imposed by the bosses.

But the approach of damage limitation is often self-defeating, reinforcing the popular view that austerity is necessary. If the union leadership cannot or will not create "facts on the ground" by winning industrial disputes then it could at least launch a convincing public information campaign against austerity and the edifice of lies upon which it is based.

The Tories' policies are not the result of incompetence but of a clear plan to reorganise society to reduce social costs for the rich. The labour movement must respond with our own plan to reorganise society in the interests of the working-class majority.

A workers' emergency plan would involve such measures as the expropriation of the banks, and democratically distributing their wealth to meet social need. It would involve vast increases in taxation of the rich and business, and a reversal of the cuts and privatisations that have taken place under the Con-Dems and under New Labour. Ultimately, such a plan could only be implemented by a workers' government — a government that governs as clearly in the interests of our class as the current government does in the interests of the rich.

To make such a plan the animating focus of our movement, we need to revolutionise our unions to make them democratic, fighting organisations.

**What the government is doing to the NHS is an act of class warfare. We need to fight back.**

### **Ideas for Freedom 2013**

#### **Marxist ideas to turn the tide**

**A weekend of socialist debate and discussion hosted by**

**Workers' Liberty**

**Friday 20 - Sunday 22 June, University of London**

**Union (nr. Euston station)**

**For more info, including how to book tickets, see**  
**[workersliberty.org/ideas](http://workersliberty.org/ideas)**

**Thatcher dead: now bury Thatcherism!**  
**See [tinyurl.com/burythatcherism](http://tinyurl.com/burythatcherism)**