

Safeguarding the Future of the NHS

Workers' Weekly Health Group

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Dudley Health Workers Fight Against PFI

Develop the Movement to Safeguard the Future of the NHS!

Call of the *Workers' Weekly Health Group*

A demonstration is taking place today organised by the UNISON Branch of the Dudley Group of Hospitals. The demonstration is part of the long running fight of Dudley hospital workers against the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme which aims to transfer 600 NHS workers to the private sector while losing 170 jobs and 70 hospital beds. The companies planning to profit from this £88 Million PFI scheme, which has a 40 year contract, are Summit Health Care Consortium which include 5 contractors to which the NHS Trust is proposing to transfer the staff.

The transfer is under the PFI which was conceived by the previous government as a mechanism to

open up the NHS as a source of profits for private companies by ceasing all public investment in hospitals and only allowing health authorities and trusts to commission new hospitals and facilities from the private sector. These facilities are then to be leased back to the NHS along with core services such as "hotel" services. Whilst the then Conservative government excluded the transfer of certain medical staff its whole conception did not yet satisfy the demands of the private sector for guaranteed and extended contracts which could still legally be rescinded by any public authority. Following the election of the New Labour Government further measures have been put in place to underwrite and guarantee these contracts for decades instead of years, guaranteeing and securing profits and removing the legal rights of Trust and

other public bodies to veto contracts once they have been signed. At the same time, in order to try and justify its actions the government claims that it has "extended the rules" which allow staff to be excluded. It is precisely the fight of the Dudley health workers which exposes the lie of these claims by the government. The Department of Health, which is the government body on health, is saying that it is not "practical" to exclude staff in this project.

Tony Blair claims that the government's NHS plan and policy is for a "modern and dependable NHS". But how is this the case when the government is putting in place mechanisms such as the PFI not to guarantee and safeguard the future of the NHS but measures to secure the contracts and profits of private companies? Such guarantees which are being given to the private sector are not

forthcoming when it is the question of meeting the health needs of the whole population at the highest level. On the contrary as a consequence beds are being reduced and scarce resources are turned into profits. Neither are they forthcoming when it should mean

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guaranteeing the livelihood of the health workers and protecting their interests so that they can serve the needs of their patients.

The demands of the Dudley health workers are not only demands which represent their interests but they are demands which are in the general interests of society. The prospects for health workers and all the people in fighting to safeguard the future of the NHS lie in refusing to accept the PFI and the whole anti-social

agenda in health. The present increasing strike and other actions of workers reveal that workers are starting to reject the ideas of "social partnership". They are refusing to remain passive in the face of the most "sincere" justifications and increasingly refusing to allow their sentiments to be manipulated for the purpose of handing over their fate to others. In the run up to the election the Dudley workers have recognised that the focus must shift to the workers and their agenda and the need for them to consider their own candidate. At the same time, it is necessary for all health workers to engage themselves in one way or another in the movement to safeguard the future of the NHS and that such a movement gives rise to health worker politicians who fight to transform this movement into a powerful force for the renewal of society.

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