

# Safeguarding the Future of the NHS

## Workers' Weekly Health Group

Volume 2, Issue 5, December 9 2001



Health Workers marching to oppose the War against Afghanistan - as part of the 100,000 people who took part in the march from Hyde Park to the Rally in Trafalgar Square on November 18.

### Statement of Workers' Weekly Health Group

September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2001

Health workers are deeply shocked and saddened by the huge loss of life and serious injuries to so many people, including so many members of the emergency services, which took place after the suicide strike on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001.

It is unimaginable and tragic that such a barbarous crime should be carried out. Yet, for health workers and workers everywhere what is causing even more concern is the way the situation is being manipulated by George W. Bush and Tony Blair and the media. In the modern world it is of utmost abhorrence that these leaders are inspired by the Nazi notion of "collective punishment" and "revenge" in which they are targeting

**Continued Over**

## What Kind of Choice Is Alan Milburn Offering Patients?

On December 6, Health Secretary Alan Milburn made the announcement in the House of Commons that he was setting out changes that would help transform the NHS from an "old-style nationalised industry" into a "modern" organisation focused on patients' needs.

He said that NHS patients that have waited for more than six months for operations will be able to get treatment in a hospital of their choice whether the hospital was public or private. However, the pilot scheme will be restricted to heart patients. Ministers were also said to be in talks to bring foreign private firms "lock, stock and barrel" to Britain to treat NHS patients. This idea is for companies to bring doctors and nurses from abroad as they build hospitals in Britain.

Critics of the government have already pointed to the immense cost of paying the private sector to carry out the operations and that it

does not address the real issues of shortages of doctors, nurses and hospital beds due to the long term and sustained underfunding of the NHS. By referring to the NHS as an "old style nationalised industry" **Alan Milburn is signalling that New Labour intends to complete the task it has set itself of privatising the health care system in Britain whilst claiming that this will not mean patients will have to pay.** In particular, following its *Concordat* with the private sector signed last year, the government is dramatically increasing the number of operations carried out by private companies. It is estimated that in the first year this

will be 100,000. Also, they are presently building an "express surgery centre" solely aimed at providing operations for patients from the NHS and besides private hospitals that will be involved.

According to reports, now that this *Concordat* with the private sector is firmly in place the government plans to raise the share of Britain's national income spent on health to the European Union average of 8% of Gross Domestic Product by 2005. Spending is set to rise to a total of £52.6 billion next year - up £4 billion on 2001. In last week's pre-Budget report, Chancellor Gordon Brown paved the

**Continued Over**

### K&C Hospital Day of Action:

## Massive Demonstration Supports Fight to Save Hospital

**The largest demonstration Canterbury has ever seen demanded on November 17: Save the Kent and Canterbury Hospital! As many as 15,000 people protested against the downgrading of the "K&C" and pledged to continue the fight.**

The demonstration, called by Concern for Health in East Kent (CHEK), marched through the city centre to the Westgate Towers. Elderly

people, people in motorised wheelchairs, councillors, MPs and people from the community, motivated by a sense

of injustice and anger that their hospital is to be reduced to cottage hospital status, thronged the streets, carrying banners and

**Continued Over**

**Workers' Weekly  
Health Group**  
To Contact Send in  
letters or material  
please E-mail:  
[wwhg@rcpbml.org.uk](mailto:wwhg@rcpbml.org.uk)  
Write to: WWHG  
John Buckle Books  
170 Wandsworth Rd  
London  
SW8 2LA  
Phone : 0207 627 0599

## What Kind of Choice Is Alan Milburn Offering Patients? - Continued

way for tax increases by calling for an "enduring national consensus" in support of a publicly-funded NHS with significantly increased capacity.

Alan Milburn told MPs that "It will for the first time be the patient's choice and that choice will no longer be between waiting longer for treatment and paying for treatment." Whilst he admitted that the situation reflected the years of underfunding the service had suffered. However, Alan Milburn claim that the issue is one of "choice" and

"focusing on patient needs" is a self serving argument to cover over the chronic underfunding of the NHS and justify choice of the transferring of health care provision to the private sector so as to focus on the needs of health care multinationals to use the planned increase in funding from the taxpayer to maximise their profits. This is the kind of choice the Health Secretary is offering. Would not patients choose that the National Health Service meet the health care needs of all members of society if this were offered?

## Statement of Workers' Weekly Health Group

September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2001 - Continued

all the oppressed peoples of the world including those countries and people who they claim "sympathise with" and "support" terrorism. They are trying to use the situation to isolate all the progressive forces who are rising up against the injustice of the neo-liberal privatisation, of global domination, poverty and disease. They fail to look at their own actions of state terrorism as being responsible for and connected to the horror of September 11. They continue sanctions and the bombing of Iraq, an act in violation of international law. They continue to arm Israel to unleash terror to stop the Palestinians even

achieving what has been agreed by the United Nations resolutions on Palestine.

Whilst this tragedy has shocked everybody, health workers and other workers must not become passive in this situation. They must not let the big powers manipulate the situation for the purpose of stepping up their reaction at home and aggression and war abroad. The peoples have a common cause and this is the cause of a new society and an end to global domination and terror and the winning of national and social liberation.

Workers Of All Countries, Unite!

## NHS Criticised over Temporary Nurses

The NHS spent £810 million on temporary nurses last year alone, the Audit Commission revealed on September 5. Highlighting the escalating costs of agency and bank nurses, the commission also suggests that patients lives could be being put at risk after it was found that pre-employment and occupational health checks were often not carried out on temporary NHS staff.

## K&C Hospital Day of Action:

## Massive Demonstration Supports Fight to Save Hospital -Continued

placards aloft. Children participated, some in a special Children's March contingent, carrying such placards as, "We All Need A&E and K&C", and "Save Lives Not Money!". The protesters staged a sit-down demonstration, led by MP Julian Brazier and the Mayor of Canterbury, Fred Whitmore, blocking the ring-road and stopping traffic for half an hour. David Shortt, chairman of CHEK, who had stood in the general election as an independent candidate on the platform of saving the K&C, said that the sit-down protest was "spontaneous, borne out of the anger of the moment and was not malicious". The police complained that "it is illegal to obstruct a public highway".

Immediately after the

march, the Mayor told a public meeting at the Westgate Hall: "The turn-out exceeds our wildest expectations. I have never known a demonstration that has filled the High Street from one end to the other."

Representatives of the East Kent Health Authority (EKHA) and the East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust had turned down invitations to discuss the downgrading of the K&C at the meeting, on the grounds that there would not be a "proper reasoned debate of the complex issues involved". David Shortt said: "I think their absence speaks volumes – they have no answer to our questions." The meeting closed with a resolution calling on Health Secretary Alan Milburn to maintain the K&C's A&E with full services. Videotapes

of the meeting were due to be sent on to the EKHA and the NHS Trust. "We have told EKHA that the issue isn't dead. It has sent a message that we are going to fight this all the way," David Shortt said.

The day of action ended with a choral concert in Canterbury Cathedral. The performers were the 210-strong Sing For Your Life choir, who performed with a 90-member orchestra. Christ Church University College music lecturer Grenville Hancox, who was inspired by the campaigning of terminal cancer victim and choir singer Larissa Lovelock, formed the choir in 1998. The singer died in her early twenties fighting for the future of the K&C from her hospital bed.

**Safeguarding the Future of the NHS**  
**Workers' Weekly Health Group**

<http://pages.unisonfree.net/wwwg>