

London

HEALTH

EMERGENCY



NUPE Bulletin

BARKING STRIKE

SUPPORTING ACTION CAN WIN IT

As the 1984 NUPE conference meets, the struggle of 92 women domestics at Barking Hospital carries on.

The strike, against a package of cuts in wages and conditions imposed by the private company Crothalls, is now into its ninth week. Since the beginning a 24 hour, seven days a week picket has been maintained on the two hospital gates.

The message from Barking hospital to this conference is clear. NUPE members, no matter what area of the public service they work in, are not afraid to stand up and fight contractors and the authorities which seek to undermine them.

But Barking is also proving once again that groups of workers striking against privatisation are weakened if they are left to fight in isolation.

Important initiatives have been taken by the London Division and the National Union to raise the profile of the Barking dispute: but there is an urgent need for an escalation of supportive action.

The District Health Authority have now issued a writ against the women in an attempt to have their hut removed



POLICE move in to arrest two pickets

from the hospital and to force them out onto the main road. This shows that the DHA are prepared to take a tougher line against the women. This should be met with an even tougher response from the union.

Other sections of workers in various areas of the country where Crothalls, or their parent company Pritchards, hold contracts should be urged to take supportive action. If workers are not unionised, local NUPE

branches should set up secondary picket lines and leaflet all employees so that Crothalls and Pritchards workers know what's happening in Barking.

The women have now been many weeks on strike pay: couldn't the London Division consider raising a levy to sustain the Barking strikers? And more NUPE members are needed on the picket lines.

Members should be encouraged to take strike action against privatisation proposals in every district, with action coordinated so no section is left to go it alone.

The Barking dispute has become very much a test case for NUPE. Victory would deal a devastating blow to all private contractors, and to their friends in the Tory government.

Let's ensure that when delegates return to their branches we see the kind of practical support that can win a famous victory.



NHS on danger list

Closures

Thornton View hospital in Bradford would have closed last summer had it not been for the courageous occupation by its staff. Occupations have also held back threatened closures in Hayes, Northwood and Pinner, St Benedicts, Longworth and EGA.

Occupations could be even more effective if backed up by national-level campaigns by health unions and by the pledge by other sections of health, public service and industrial workers to take **supporting strike action** in the event of a "raid" by DHA management to close down the hospitals. Such defence is now urgently needed at Thornton View, where the closure has now been authorised by Health Minister Clark. (A booklet on how to organise an occupation will shortly be published by London Health Emergency, price 65p including postage).

Creeping cuts

Almost every health worker has a tel to tell of the gradual insidious erosion of standards and working conditions as Tory spending cuts have been imposed. Maintenance

and repairs stop being carried out. Vacant posts are left unfilled — or full-time nurses are replaced by agency staff with no loyalty to the NHS or the hospital. Equipment is allowed to run down without replacement.

This grinds down the morale of the staff, worsens conditions for the patients and strengthens the hand of management. After a period of such "creeping cuts" they may move in to:

- * Declare wards or whole hospitals "unsafe" and "announce" their closure.

- * Exploit the demoralisation of staff to impose new "productivity" proposals.

- * Use the obsolescence or disrepair of NHS equipment as a pretext to invite in private contractors.

"Creeping cuts" are less dramatic than headline-hitting closures and redundancies; but the damage they do is no less great. Branches and stewards' committees must publicise and fight each and every cutback as it occurs, and must be given confidence they will get full official support in taking a stand.

Privatisation

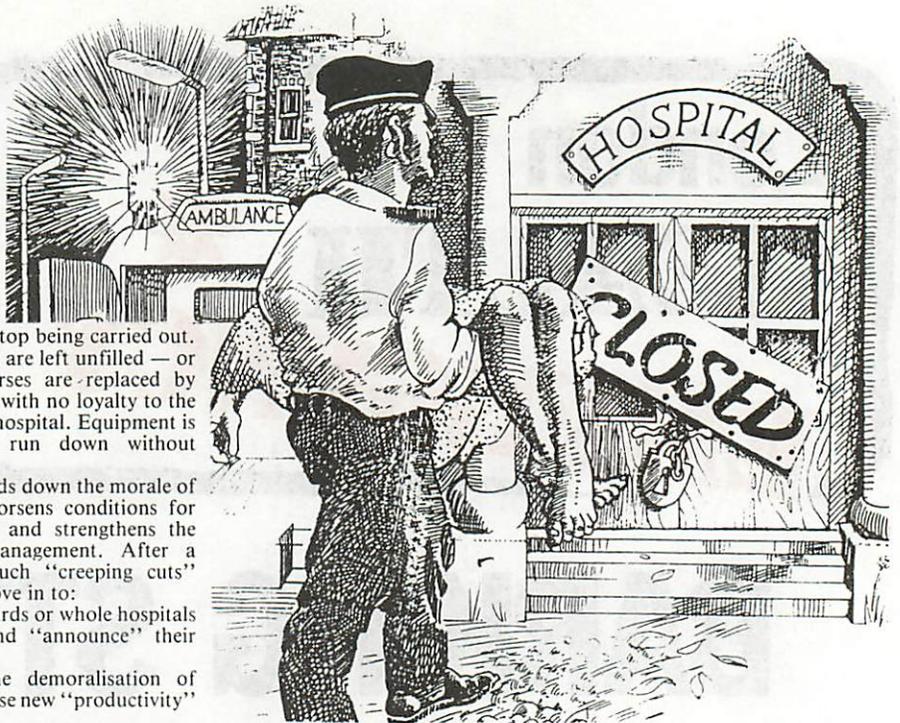
The Tories' determination to

privatise all NHS ancillary services is tied both to their drive to smash up the NHS and restore private profit to health care, and to their relentless measures to break the strength of the trade union movement. That is why Tory "Think Tank" plans, to make it a **criminal offence** for health workers to take strike action, now run alongside DHSS instructions to DHAs to begin putting out ancillary work to private tender.

The only way we can fight back is through solid, coordinated strike action at workplace, District and,

where possible, national level.

When the DHAs begin to follow up the tendering process by allocating contracts and issuing union members with warning notices, public sector unions must be ready to embark on sustained strike action in defence of jobs and services. This means that general educational material on privatisation must now be coupled with workplace meetings and preparation for action along the kind of lines put forward in the Camden and Oxfordshire NHS resolutions at this conference.



* London Health Emergency was set up in 1983 with GLC support to coordinate local campaigns against health cuts in London. We are run by a Steering Committee drawn from local campaigns and union delegates.

* We are committed to: reversing the present health cuts; combatting privatisation; and democratising the NHS.

* We will be producing a monthly bulletin as well as pamphlets, leaflets, badges and posters to support the local and London-wide struggles against the cuts. We can provide speakers for trade union, Labour Party and other meetings on the cuts. Our aim is to support struggles under way against the cuts and privatisation, and to create the kind of local campaigns which can encourage health workers wherever necessary to take industrial action — strikes, work-ins, or supporting action — to defend jobs and services.

* We are always available to offer advice, support, material assistance and resources to health workers and local campaigns.

* There are now campaigns in all 31 London health districts.

* Also affiliated to London Health Emergency are: NUPE; GMBATU (Southern Region); Districts and branches of NALGO; ASTMS; COHSE and NUPE; and several Trades Councils and Community Health Councils.

* To succeed we need far more affiliations from union branches, Labour Parties, community and other organisations. A single (£10) fee affiliates your organisation both to the local health campaign and to London Health Emergency. In exchange we will send you 100 copies of our monthly bulletin, and regular mailings on events and struggles London-wide.

* Make sure your organisation affiliates.



Please affiliate this organisation to London Health Emergency.

Name of organisation

Name Position held

Signature

Please send extra copies of the monthly bulletin at £2 per 100 per month.

I enclose £ affiliation fee (£5 local campaign/£5 LHE)

plus £ for extra bulletins, totalling (make cheques/POs to London Health Service Campaign)

SEND TO LONDON HEALTH EMERGENCY, 335, GRAYS INN RD, WC1.