

Photo: Melanie Friend (Report)



We'll fight to save St Leonards!

By Andrea Campbell (Secretary, Hackney Branch COHSE)

The DHA have systematically run the hospital down over the past five years, from a thriving acute general hospital to a medical unit with a walk-in casualty open from 9 to 5.

Despite this the hospital remains very popular with local people and is always busy. The authority members have lied and manipulated statistics to try to convince people who use St. Leonards that they will be better off with it closed.

But the people of Hackney know better and have waged a strong continuous fight with Hackney Health Emergency to oppose the loss of the hospital. Last September over 1,000 angry people, many of them local hospital workers, left the DHA and the Tory government in no doubt about how we felt about the snatching of our health

facilities. At a stormy DHA meeting Louis Freedman, a wealthy property speculator, refused to use his casting vote to save the hospital. He was locked in the council chamber and had to be rescued by the police.

Hackney Health Emergency has been working for the past fifteen months to mobilise workers and the community to oppose any cuts of job losses.

Because of the immense public pressure the DHA were forced to compromise on their original plan to shut the entire hospital, and instead put forward a proposal to keep a limited number of out-patient clinics on the St. Leonards site.

They were also forced to say that Hackney could not stand losing all the beds in St Leonards (most of which are now geriatric) and proposed to move 60 of the

remaining 90 medical beds to St Bartholomew's in the City. HHE opposed this plan because of the threat to jobs and the loss of beds. It was still a cut.

Two weeks ago Kenneth Clarke agreed to the proposal put forward by the DHA. His decision came on Wednesday, June 6th. The District's officers were all at the hospital by Thursday lunchtime to meet and 'reassure' the workers.

They did not of course inform any of the union branch secretaries or stewards of the meeting. We heard about it by chance. When he was questioned about the number of job losses there would be, the District Administrator could only say that they hadn't worked things out yet!

The quickness of the Minister's decision and the rapid movement of the District Management Team to meet the

workers are an attempt to defuse the mood of anger which exists in the hospital and amongst the community.

The message coming across loud and clear is that it has not worked. There are no 'spare' jobs for the workers at St Leonards. There are no beds, no community facilities to take the 30 elderly and frail people who will be turfed out of the hospital by these hatchet-wielding Tory bureaucrats.

St Bartholomews, a large prestige teaching hospital controlled by a hierarchic medical mafia is not concerned about elderly people from Hackney. They are not "interesting" enough. They block beds. They are a nuisance.

Kenneth Clarke says that old people will be better looked after without St Leonards. Coming from a minister who has shut hundreds of hospitals and caused severe hardship and suffering to thousands of old people without

blinking, these words are an insult and a mockery.

Hackney needs St Leonards hospital. Local GPs (100 of them signed a petition to keep it open) know it. Local residents know it and health workers know it.

The government also knows it but chooses to put its financial balance sheets weighted in favour of defence and war first in its list of priorities.

The fight to keep St Leonards is only starting. The message in September was we will not let it close. The message now ten months later is the same. Freedman and his cowardly crew of cutters have no place in Hackney's health care.

Hospital workers and local people cannot afford to lose more health facilities. We say to Thatcher, Clarke and Freedman and the DHA, we will accept no cuts, no closures and no job losses. St Leonards will stay. We will take you on and win.

Kenneth Clarke, Minister of Health, with a stroke of his pen and hypocritical "concern" has condemned a whole community to a wilderness of health care. In a cold calculated decision to save money at the expense of lives, he agreed to the City and Hackney District Health Authority's proposal to close St. Leonards Hospital.

Ganging up

The Contract Cleaning and maintenance Association, which groups some 41 contractors, has adopted a code of conduct in the tendering for health contracts, calling on all members firms to pay Whitley rates of hourly wages.

But there is no obligation whatever to provide the other conditions enjoyed by NHS staff — in particular sickness benefit and holiday pay. The main method so far of screwing profits from cleaning contracts has been through cutting back on the number of hours worked rather than the hourly rate of pay.

It appears that the contracting

firms have agreed on the common line of paying NHS rates in an effort to regulate the in-fighting between themselves as each firm struggles for a larger share of the £400m cake on offer in the form of as many as 2,000 NHS cleaning contracts.

The larger, established contractors hope by keeping pay levels stable to make it more difficult for new, smaller outfits to undercut them. They also want the NHS to adopt an exclusive list of "approved" contractors — you've guessed it! All members of the CCMA!

In reality it seems likely that individual firms, under pressure to secure a slice of NHS business will begin to break ranks on pay — unleashing an ugly round of wage-cutting. In any event there seems little reason to believe that this particular gang of thieves will long honour their own agreements.

Stamp them out!

Following on from the same kind of abandonment of standards which comes with privatisation and exploiting the existence of a lucrative 'market' for quack remedies, Harley Street has long been infested with its own species of up-market cockroaches — the charlatans and con-men flogging sex-remedies and dubious cosmetic

treatments to people with more money than sense.

But there is little point in the gutter press getting annoyed about the Harley Street rip-offs, which according to the Daily Express are now driving away wealthy Arab clients. The shysters are simply the logical end-product of present government policies which the Sun, the Mail and the Express so eagerly support.

The abuses of Harley Street — and the sick spectacle of medical care being dispensed only to those with the cash to afford it — could be brought to an end tomorrow. All it needs is a government prepared to nationalise the existing clinics and private foundations, and make private medicine illegal!



Cockroaches angry at press reports

Leaders of the Confederation of British Contract Cockroaches have strongly defended the Government's plans for privatisation.

Following an angry mass meeting of cockroaches in the grounds of Barking Hospital, staged to protest at 'biased' press coverage of cockroach activity on the wards, a statement was given to reporters stressing the contribution which these increasingly large insects are making to the cleaning efforts of the main contractors, Crothalls.

'Under previous governments, the private enterprise of Contract Cockroaches faced constant harassment.

'Now at last we are being given the chance in Barking to show what we can do when the bureaucratic red tape is cut loose. This government has finally given the small insect his head.

'The CBCC has for years argued that cockroaches have a role to play in cleaning up the morsels of rotting food and debris left behind by private contract cleaners, and at no extra cost to the taxpayer.

'Now, in close liaison with the scab workforce of Crothalls, we are showing in Barking Hospital the kind of insect-human cooperation which should be a model for the NHS. We are not simply feeding off the NHS; we are making a real contribution.

'Our services are increasingly appreciated by the less squeamish patients, some doctors and most DHA members.'

Brushing aside recent newspaper reports of a terrified mother sheltering her baby against an infestation of cockroaches, the CBCC representative hit back angrily at 'sensationalist' coverage.

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Citing statements by consultant bacteriologist Dr Robertson, who sits on Redbridge DHA, the CBCC spokesperson challenged reporters to 'name a single disease which our members could give a baby simply by crawling over it.'

Accusing critics and the mother in question of being 'politically motivated', the cockroach leader insisted:

'Our members were merely checking the baby and its bed for edible morsels of rotting food. This is routine procedure for our Barking night shift.'

He went on: 'Our members do a dirty and sometimes hazardous job: we are now the mainstays of the hospital cleaning operation.'

'Those who ignorantly criticise our work are simply arguing for the return of the bad old days of in-house NHS cleaning, when cockroaches were subjected to all manner of ill-treatment and denied a livelihood.'

Cockroach leaders have rejected claims that they are opposed to the privatisation of NHS catering services, with the resulting decline in standards of food provided.

'There is no denying that the lower quality of the scraps left around for our members will be a problem,' said a representative of the Confederation of British Contract Cockroaches. 'But against that we must set the fact that larger quantities of food with be discarded uneaten, and kitchen facilities will be less thoroughly cleaned. My members are prepared to exchange quantity for quality.'

'The CBCC is still four-square behind privatisation and the contractors.'