

HOSPITALS MERGE; THE DECIMATION BEGINS

So now we know, at least 1200 jobs and 186 beds to go following the merger. Approximately 440 of them will be nurses. The management claim they will be able to achieve these job losses through 'natural wastage'; such a lovely term isn't it? To listen to them you would think they are benignly sitting back and letting people drift away of their own free will. Do not believe it - they are doing no such thing.

There are many nurses who work hours to suit their partners so as to be able to have mutual childcare arrangements. Similarly there are others who are the sole carer of their children and work hours to suit paid childcare agencies or school hours. This arrangement with the employer is long standing and very popular with staff. It is not detrimental to the smooth running of a ward or department and is very easily accommodated. However this is no longer acceptable to our caring, sharing management. They see it as an easy way to reduce the workforce with no financial payoffs involved and with none of the adverse publicity for themselves that compulsory redundancies would bring.

An offer you can't refuse

Staff with this working arrangement are being hauled before management and told they are not being flexible enough. They are told they must now be available to work any hours, i.e. full shift cover, 24 hours a day. Therefore, whatever their personal circumstances, be it with young children and a partner that works away or single-handedly bringing up children on their own they

are now expected to work night shifts, afternoon shifts and school holidays. Actually I lie. They are not expected to work these hours because the management don't want them to agree to it. The idea of course is to make them an 'offer' they have to refuse, they resign and that's it, one less on the payroll.

Specialists targeted

Another aspect of this is that many of those being targeted are specialist nurses with unique roles. Amongst them are pain specialists, epilepsy specialists, complementary therapists, asthma specialists and a whole host of others. Many of them do home visits along with offering a telephone help and advice service and as a result of which many of their patients do not have to attend hospital as often as they might otherwise. So it is easy to see that with less or none of these nurses in post the A&E department is going to be even busier. Coupled with this A&E staff are being got rid of too. So not only will those remaining have a higher admission rate there will be less staff to deal with it.

Until recently there has been no organised resistance to the job cuts. Individuals are being left to be picked off one by one. The unions, shamefully but not unexpectedly, continued to bury their heads in the sand leaving management to have it all their own way. At last however UNISON officials have woken up and belatedly admitted they have been slow in consulting their members and they are now starting to organise. There have been two mass meetings at the QMC in one day. Some attending felt intimidated and overwhelmed by the current situation whilst others were more defiant, there was even talk of industrial action.

Continued on the next page...

Demonstration

"The NHS is on its Knees - Get on your Feet to save it"

Saturday 23rd September, Nottingham

Assemble 10am at the Forest Recreation Ground, Mansfield Rd

Called by *Unison* and the *Royal College of Nursing*

Trade Union Freedom Bill

Workers in Britain have been shackled by decades of anti-union law. Introduced by Thatcher, they have been maintained by New Labour which has no intention of repealing them; seeking as it does to replace the Tories as the party of business.

During this period of industrial change, employers like those at Gate Gourmet have adopted increasingly aggressive cost-cutting tactics to win subcontracted work from profitable trans-national companies. There have been many examples of employers cutting pay, slashing pensions and announcing mass redundancies in the name of competition and higher profits. Privatisation, outsourcing and restructuring of companies and services has become widespread. The existing legislation helps them achieve this as it is blatantly weighted against unions and the interests of those workers they seek to represent. This was recently demonstrated at train operators Midland Mainline last year when staff refused to take trains out on the grounds of health and safety. When their union head office sought to organise official industrial action on this issue, and balloted them the courts ruled it illegal. The judge said any action would have been 'tainted' by the previous 'unofficial' action taken by the guards – even though the supposed 'unofficial action' was in fact workers exercising their supposed legal right to refuse to work on safety grounds!

Continued from front page...

The following day Medical Secretaries showed the way with a demonstration outside the main entrance of the QMC on Derby Road. Hundred of leaflets were distributed to the public with many names added to the petition sheets. As time went on some became more adventurous and stood in the middle of Derby Road handing out leaflets to passing motorists. There was a lot of tooting of horns in support which, in turn, boosted the confidence of the demonstration. For many it was the first time they had done such a thing and they really got into the swing of it in a very short time. The protest went on for almost two hours and featured, albeit very briefly, on the local BBC television news. The Evening Post also attended.

So, the task now is to build on that small beginning to get a massive Nottingham turnout for the joint UNISON/RCN demonstration on Saturday 23rd. September and after that to continue the struggle to show the management they will not get away without a fight.

**A. Nurse
QMC, Nottingham**

Of course trade unionists are fighting back and they will be aided in this by the campaign for a Trade Union Freedom Bill (TUFB). The Bill aims to rectify the most glaring inequities of the current legislation. The TUFB hopes to provide better protection for striking workers, simpler and fairer industrial action balloting and notice procedures. It will restrict the use of injunctions by employers, allow solidarity action in certain circumstances and prevent the use of replacement labour during strikes. These modest demands are already the norm in most of Europe. It would also force the Government to respect the international treaties on labour that it has signed up to. The U.N.'s International Labour Organisation (ILO) regularly admonishes the UK government for disregarding them. Amongst other indictments it says that the very complexity of UK balloting laws is inconsistent with the right to strike guaranteed in ILO Convention 87 as is the blanket ban on solidarity action which it says is an essential element of freedom of association.

At the present time 167 Labour MPs, from a total of 353 have signed the Early Day Motion (EDM), there are 182 signatories in total. Labour Party policy, in line with that of the TUC is for the repeal of the anti-union laws and the introduction of a TUFB - so why have less than half of its MPs signed the EDM? It is a good question and one which trade unionists should be asking of their elected representatives. There is certainly a class divide on this issue. There are no Conservative MPs backing this motion, in fact the Tories have laid down a wrecking amendment. They know which side of the class divide they are on so you would have to ask those Labour MPs who haven't signed which side they are on. It should also be obvious that any candidate for LP leadership should be a signatory to this motion. Local Labour MPs who haven't signed the TUFB EDM include John Heppell, Vernon Coaker, Graham Allen, Geoff Hoon, Bob Laxton, Margaret Beckett and Liz Blackman. And certainly the next time anybody suggests giving Vernon Coaker money at election time - which my union did at the last election - his attitude to the TUFB EDM will be a litmus test.

The TUFB is not just a litmus test for Labour MPs but for the whole labour movement. We should aim to mobilise branches in every trade union to continue the campaign at a local level – if the Bill is passed this is not the end of the story. Much anti-union legislation will remain in place and it's our task to challenge every shackle that seeks to bind our right to withdraw our labour.

There is website to check who has signed the EDM at: <http://edmi.parliament.uk/edmi/> (search for EDM number 1170)

And the following leaflet gives more details <http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/freedombill.pdf>

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