

UK SEP candidate condemns huge increase in day care charges for the elderly

Of Stephen Woodbridge, SEP candidate in Bretton North, Peterborough
17 April 2012

The following statement has been issued by Stephen Woodbridge, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for the Bretton North ward of Peterborough in local elections on May 3.

Day care charges for Peterborough's elderly people have soared an astronomical 1,200 percent over the last few months—a direct result of the austerity measures being imposed by the Conservative-controlled Peterborough city council.

The consequences for our most vulnerable citizens were revealed by the *Evening Telegraph* last week in its report on 93-year-old Ivy Carafa. Last year, Ivy, who suffers from dementia, was paying £2 a day to visit the Greenwood House care home near the city centre. In January, the charge was increased to £13 a day. On April 23, it will rise to £24 a day. If Ivy continues visiting Greenwood House daily, it will use up all her pension.

Bretton North's Conservative councillor Wayne Fitzgerald, a cabinet member for adult social care, argued that the rise “has been necessary partly due to reduced funding from government and increasing demands made on the overall adult social care budgets.”

In a turn of phrase worthy of George Orwell, Fitzgerald added, “I am sure most people would agree this is only right and proper, thus protecting those who are less well off.”

Ivy Carafa's cruel predicament is just a foretaste of the future as the National Health Service (NHS) is dismantled.

The increased charges are one of the first actions by the council after it took over Adult Care Social Services from the Primary Care Trust, NHS Peterborough. The Trust is being abolished under the government's latest health service legislation, which effectively ends free

and comprehensive health care and hands huge swathes of the NHS over to the private sector.

At the same time, the NHS is facing “efficiency savings “ of £20 billion. In Peterborough, the Adult Social Care Services have been told to find “efficiency savings “ of £4.1 million in 2012-2013 and £7.3 million the year after.

The city council has been working with international service company Serco to achieve these savings. Serco, no doubt, has its eye on taking over these services itself.

In 2009, the company won a contract to provide the council's Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) services and last November took over the administration department. With the recent transfer of leisure services to the not-for-profit trust Vivacity and maintenance and cleaning to outsourcing contractor Enterprise, the number of full-time workers employed by the council has dropped to less than half the 2,084 in post in April 2010. Jobs have since been cut at these organisations despite promises made at the time of outsourcing that they would not.

Former Labour councillor, now Independent, Charles Swift, complained that the Tories were responsible for “the death of local government...in a few years' time, the system will be abolished.”

But Swift is shedding crocodile tears. It was Labour that made the first significant inroads into the NHS through the Private Finance Initiative, by which private firms received public funds to build and maintain hospitals on extraordinarily generous contracts. In Peterborough, the cost of the £300 million PFI City hospital has driven the Trust into deficit, amounting to 25 percent of its income. Huge cuts are on the way—less than 18 months after it was opened.

The trade unions bear a major responsibility for all

this. The July 2010 UNISON report, “The value of trade union involvement to service delivery, “ shows how the threat of 400 job losses in Peterborough in 2008 led to “both sides “ concluding “that the serious problems [i.e., opposition amongst the workforce] could be best tackled by the council and UNISON working together in a more open relationship. “ A new Joint Consultative Forum was set up, which eased through 30 compulsory redundancies and forced many more workers to take voluntary redundancy.

UNISON’s branch secretary, Rona Henry, declared, “We are expecting financial problems in 2010 but we are confident that by working together we will be in a much better position to protect our member’s jobs and services to the local community...we are all reaping the benefits of a more open, partnership style of working. “

Of course, members’ jobs weren’t protected. But some indeed did reap the benefits. A recent Freedom of Information request from the right-wing outfit, the TaxPayers’ Alliance, reveals that UNISON receives a subsidy from the council of £83,500—the majority of which pays for the salary of Rona Hendry and her assistant branch secretary, Mark Burn.

It is no wonder that Conservative councillor Irene Walsh, cabinet member for community, cohesion and safety, declared, “I believe that through building positive relations with the trade unions, that we have been able to effect change to date without litigation or industrial action/unrest. “

As I insist in my manifesto for the elections, “The trade unions are not workers’ organisations, but industrial policemen for the bosses. Faced with the most severe cuts since the Second World War, they have not lifted a finger in defence of jobs and services. After a few token gestures, they are signing up to cuts in public sector pensions, while job losses and wage cuts go unopposed up and down the country. “

Our campaign is directed at encouraging a political rebellion against the labour and trade union bureaucracy, through the formation of rank-and-file committees of action in every workplace and community and the building of a new socialist party.

We stand for an independent movement of the working class to bring down the coalition government and replace it with a workers’ government that will reorganise society on the basis of social need, not private profit.

I call on all workers and youth who agree with this programme to support and participate in my campaign and join the SEP.



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