

SEP (UK) election campaign: Oppose the privatisation of essential social assets

Stephen Woodbridge, SEP candidate in Bretton North, Peterborough
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The following statement has been released by Stephen Woodbridge, the SEP's candidate for the Bretton North ward in Peterborough in the May 3 local council election.

The last weeks have also seen the government announce that it will sell part of its share in the UK's air traffic control and outline its schedule for the privatisation of Royal Mail.

Air traffic control was partly privatised in 2001, with 51 percent being transferred to the private sector including a consortium of airlines. The government plans to reduce its own share to around 25 percent, realising a projected £250 million.

Simultaneously, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition set out plans for the privatisation of the Royal Mail next year. In preparation, the government is proposing to write-off £1 billion in public loans made to the service while the regulator Ofcom has said it will lift the cap on charges for first-class mail.

These plans are part of a massive programme of privatisation, the largest of which target education and the health service.

The government has extended the Academy school project first initiated by Labour. Academies and the government's new Free Schools programme, involve businesses, charities and voluntary groups in running schools. Free from Local Authority control, they are able to determine the curriculum and set teachers' pay. More than 40 percent of schools in England have already been made into academies and the government has compelled others to take part.

The latest variant is the "John Lewis" partnership model proposed by Clarendon Academies. Run by City financiers Edwin Richards and Nigel à Brassard, it proposes that school staff be treated as part-owners,

with shareholders receiving a portion of any profits generated. Clarendon has said its target is to run a chain of 2,000 schools, 10 percent of state schools.

Potentially the most lucrative of the government's privatisation projects involves the National Health Service (NHS). Already two hospitals in England have been privatised outright, as major corporations line up to cherry-pick the most profitable aspects of care and provision.

Now it has been announced that the private outsourcing firm Capita is to take over the handling of emergency calls to the London Fire Brigade this summer. Other Fire Brigades, faced with tight budgets are expected to follow suit.

This trend will accelerate as the coalition's Health and Social Care Bill becomes law. Under its terms, the NHS ceases to be a comprehensive and universal provider. Starved of funds, and with some 49 percent of hospital beds earmarked for private patients, it will provide only the most basic and limited care.

Consortiums led by General Practitioners (GPs) will take control of £60 billion of NHS funding and determine treatments. Recent research found that at least half of the commissioning groups have financial interests with non-NHS providers. In some instances, all of the GPs involved are in partnership with private health providers such as Virgin Care.

The first ever large-scale privatisation involving children's services is already underway, with NHS Devon and Devon county council short-listing bids from Serco and Virgin Care for "frontline services for children across the county".

The £130 million three-year contract includes "some of the most sensitive care for highly vulnerable children and families, such as some child protection services, treatment for mentally ill children and adolescents,

therapy and respite care for those with disabilities, health visiting, and palliative nursing for dying children.”

The contract, which will be awarded this month, will be based on “the most economically advantageous” bid.

Prime Minister David Cameron has also announced plans for the effective privatisation of roads and motorways. Portrayed as a means of “improving” Britain’s crumbling infrastructure—in no small measure as a result of the coalition’s austerity measures—the government has lobbied in China and elsewhere to attract sovereign wealth funds and pension funds to the project. These private entities would be able to lease roads on a long-term contract. Should they create “new capacity”—by building new roads or lanes—they will be able to impose a toll.

The plan is part of the National Infrastructure Project 2011 covering 500 projects, mainly in transport and energy, which are expected to attract £20 billion of private funds.

Measures to privatise policing have also been outlined. Under plans announced by police in the West Midlands and in Surrey, private firms will be able to undertake criminal investigations, carry out arrests and operate patrols.

Bids are being sought from major private security firms, including G4S and Serco. The two companies, along with Reliance, are currently involved with the UK Border Agency (UKBA), detaining and removing failed asylum seekers. Their role has expanded, with the three recently winning contracts worth £620 million from the UKBA. They have been given responsibility for working with other private subcontractors, and voluntary and non-profit groups such as Migrant Help and the Refugee Council, in a move which it is claimed will save millions of pounds in costs.

G4S is heavily involved in the government’s plans to privatise UK prisons. In July the coalition announced that nine prisons were being put out to 15-year tender, in the largest prison privatisation project so far. The government has made clear that many more are to follow.

The plans build on the privatisation measures piloted by Labour under its Private Finance Initiative. There are no differences between the official parties on this sell-off, which will mean that any area of public

provision can, in the immediate or near future, be transferred to big business.

The Socialist Equality Party condemns this plundering of vital assets, built up over decades, so that private corporations can make a killing at society’s expense.

We stand for the transformation of the banks and major corporations into publicly owned and democratically controlled utilities. This must be part of a major redistribution of wealth away from the rich to provide decent paying jobs, free and high quality health, housing, education and social services.

I urge all those who agree with this programme to support the SEP election campaign and join and build the SEP.



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