

Socialist Equality Party (Britain) launches National Health Service Fightback web site

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party has launched a web site, South West NHS FightBack, as the basis for organising opposition to the attempt by a consortium of 19 NHS (National Health Service) Trust managements to cut the wages and conditions of some 60,000 workers.

The pay cartel they have established is an attempt, backed by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government, to impose, in hospitals in the South West of England Trusts, reduced wages, performance-based pay, increased working hours, and cuts to unsocial-hours payments, sickness absence enhancements and annual leave.

The attacks are a test case for the 1.5 million NHS workers across the country and are a prelude to further privatisation of health care. If successful, they will be rolled out across the UK, as part of the ongoing drive to slash public spending, including lopping £20 billion off the £108 billion NHS budget.

Anyone who resists the plans will risk having his or her existing contract terminated.

A leaked Project Initiation Document (PID) states that it wants to create a “flexible workforce able to respond to any qualified provider”—i.e., any private company that is looking to make profits from patient care.

NHS workers have already suffered a two-year wage freeze while inflation is at 3 to 5 percent a year and are forced to work ever-longer hours to make ends meet.

The impact on patient care is appalling.

The SEP is advancing the call for the creation of action committees encompassing NHS workers and working people more generally to take forward the fight against these attacks. This is vital, given the abject refusal of the health unions to defend their members and their focus on futile petitions and letter writing to management and MPs—the very people imposing the

cuts.

The SEP’s statement states, “Action committees are required, independent of the unions, to unify all staff with patients and the wider population to prevent the dismantling of the NHS.”

It insists that the defence of essential services requires a socialist political struggle “against the entire capitalist system and the big business parties that say that the selfish interests of the financial aristocracy are more important than the needs of working people.”

The response to the web site has been warm, with hits approaching 1,000 in just a week of operation. These are overwhelmingly the result of an ambitious intervention by SEP members at many of the targeted hospitals, though hits have come in from around the world.

An article on the campaign posted on the site explains that thousands of leaflets have been handed out.

Many NHS staff expressed their concern about the government’s massive cuts and the implications of the Health and Social Care Act. Comments have been posted on the web site by workers in which they talk about privatisation, working conditions and the role of the trade unions.

One said how health care provision has declined: “It’s a business more than a national health service, more and more outside businesses coming in, private companies, which are under cutting drastically which actually reduces the service.”

Another explains, “Union leaders and the employers first have back door discussion about what is to come. Then the union leaders come to us and try to convince us the employers’ positions. It happened several times in this hospital. The pay cartel thing is the latest one.”

Though focusing initially on the South West, the SEP’s intention is also to roll out the campaign

nationally and, through the *World Socialist Web Site*, internationally as well. This latest assault has been targeted on the South West workforce only as a means to divide and conquer. The response must be united action, breaking the firewall erected by the trade unions on behalf of management whenever an attack is levelled.

We urge all NHS workers, health workers in other countries, and all readers of the WSWS to subscribe to, follow and write for South West NHS Fightback on their thoughts and experiences,

It is backed up by a Facebook account and Twitter feeds.

To access the web site, visit:
<https://southwestnhsfightback.wordpress.com/>

Or Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/South-West-NHS-Fightback/428527033855560>



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