

Bournemouth health workers attend NHS FightBack meeting against redundancies and cuts

Our reporters
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NHS Fightback, a campaign initiated by the Socialist Equality Party, held a successful meeting in Bournemouth last Sunday.

A number of health workers attended, including several employed by the Bournemouth Intermediate Care Service (BICS) who have recently received redundancy notices.

World Socialist Web Site reporter and National Health Service (NHS) worker Ajanta Silva explained that the meeting was being held against the backdrop of a rapidly worsening global political and social crisis. The dangerous and relentless military actions by the Trump administration in the United States have brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

Silva said of the snap general election in Britain and the presidential election in France, “Whatever their outcome, the working class will have to pay the price for the crisis created by the ruling elites.”

The issues of war and austerity are profoundly connected to the crisis in the health service, Silva explained. This is expressed in the tens of billions of pounds in cuts to the NHS and the unprecedented closures of vital services being imposed nationally.

The cuts being imposed by the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group are bound up with privatisation, the latest example of which was the opening of a new private unit in Bournemouth Hospital.

The massive NHS deficit in Dorset, as elsewhere in Britain, was largely the result of the austerity policies that the Labour government of Gordon Brown imposed in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008. These were continued by the Conservative/Liberal Democrats coalition that followed and now the Theresa May Conservative administration.

The NHS debt and funding crisis has, in turn, been used to demand further cuts, restructuring and privatisation.

The responsibility for this lies with the trade unions, which have sabotaged every struggle of the working class for decades, including capitulating to the government’s attacks on pensions in 2011 and isolating the junior doctors’ struggle last year.

This record of betrayal, Silva stated, gave rise to the plight now facing 13 Bournemouth Intermediate Care Service (BICS) workers.

Management is attempting to prevent them from making a public appeal in defence of their jobs, demanding “confidentiality” and threatened that non-compliance could put redundancy payments at risk: “These threats are used to prevent any opposition developing to the trade unions efforts to isolate the BICS workers. They are telling the BICS workers to keep quiet and dutifully work within the framework of management’s ‘nine-step’ redundancy process. Nine steps to losing your job.”

Silva explained that the decision of May to call a snap election was a devastating indictment of Labour. This is a party in which a large number of its right-wing MPs want to lose the election, in order to hasten the departure of its leader Jeremy Corbyn. Some Labour MPs have resigned and others are calling openly for support for the Liberal Democrats!

“Corbyn is talking about fighting back against the Tory onslaught and the deepening offensive by the super-rich against working people. But frankly, that fight can only be successfully waged if it begins with a broadside against the majority of Labour MPs, the Labour Party apparatus and its councillors.

“No one should believe that this party, which spent the past two years seeking to get rid of Corbyn, will now go into battle with him against the Tories and the ruling class.”

In reality, Corbyn and his Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell have capitulated on every occasion to their opponents. Silva explained that pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party have played a politically criminal role in boosting Corbyn’s standing among workers and young people, portraying his election as proof that a fight was underway for the “soul” of the Labour Party.

This deception was opposed from the outset by the Socialist Equality Party. Silva quoted from its very first statement on Corbyn’s 2015 victory:

“No one can seriously propose that this party—which, in its politics and organisation and the social composition of its apparatus, is Tory in all but name—can be transformed into an instrument of working class struggle. The British Labour Party did not begin with Blair. It is a bourgeois party of more than a century’s standing and a tried and tested instrument of British imperialism and its state machine. Whether led by Clement Attlee, James Callaghan or Jeremy Corbyn, its essence remains unaltered.”

Silva closed his remarks by appealing to the audience, “You have come to this meeting because you are dissatisfied with what is happening. You want to do something about it. You have read our material. You know we are calling for the formation of independent action committees to oppose the closure of hospitals and other health facilities. We say the right to free, high quality and universal health care means the fight for socialism. The interests of patients and the vital jobs of doctors, nurses and other health workers must be placed before the insatiable profit drive of the financial and corporate elite.

“This is the perspective we are putting forward. But the most important question is for the working class, for you, to fight for this perspective. Working people have to break from the Labour Party and the unions. For decades, they have betrayed one struggle after another. How much longer does this have to go on? Without a break from the unions and Labour Party there will be nothing left of public services, of the welfare state.”

In the discussion period, the BICS workers explained

that although they had been called to a meeting with the CEO of Dorset Health Care University NHS Trust on April 13, “it did not seem to resolve the redundancy issue.”

One explained that the CEO “did not even appear to understand what sort of work BICS do in the community and what people in Bournemouth were going to lose.”

Another said she had written to her MP and he had not bothered replying.

A Bournemouth hospital worker expressed concerns about the ongoing erosion of services and was shocked to hear the details Silva presented about the planned cuts to health care in Dorset.

A pensioner expressed his frustration at the onslaught on the NHS and other austerity attacks. He thanked the SEP and NHS FightBack for holding the meeting.

One young man said afterwards, “I think the meeting was good and informative. We need more support to defend the NHS. They should look after vulnerable people like us. It is disgusting how the NHS is being treated. It is not fair for the staff. I suffer from fits and on one occasion I was on the floor for three days. Luckily, my neighbours found me and called the police. These things happen because of the health cuts. It is appalling that 13 health workers are going to lose their jobs in Bournemouth Intermediate Care. I do support the fight to defend their jobs and services.”



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