



# Lewisham Issue 50 (07 December 2014)

# Hospital Worker

A Workers' Liberty healthworkers' bulletin

www.workersliberty.org • hospitalworkerbulletin@gmail.com • 0207 394 8923

## ISS workers strike!

As NHS workers walked out for our national 4 hour strike, over 200 GMB members at Queen Elizabeth Hospital walked out for 48 hours, demanding fair pay. Their employer ISS wasted tens of thousands of pounds trying to break the strike through legal challenges and scab-herding. They spent £50,000 trying (but failing!) to get a high court injunction to stop the strike. They shipped in scabs from around the country, put them up in a posh hotel in Canary Wharf, fed them lavish spreads to sweeten the deal, and then flooded our hospital with these unskilled, inexperienced staff. This vicious firm is quite willing to invest money in union-busting but balks at paying a living wage! Despite ISS's efforts, for 48 hours the workers proved they were vital to the running of our hospital.

Managers had to empty bins, the soaps ran out in A&E, the floors in ICU became dangerously slippery, and confused porters wandered the corridors. It makes the ISS employees sick knowing they could have let their patients and fellow workers down, but profit-hungry bosses wouldn't listen to reason. The porters, cleaners, security guards, hostesses and switchboard workers are demanding pay in line with NHS workers. They currently receive just £7.10-7.32 an hour, with minimal unsocial hours pay, and reduced sick pay for weekend workers. ISS are commissioned by Meridian - the PFI company - who, in turn, receive money from the Trust. Apparently, the Trust pays ISS enough money to fund every worker on NHS rates - but it's not reaching the pay cheques of the workers. Suspicions are that ISS are funding other projects and paying shareholders first. The only credible, long-term solution is to take all workers in the hospital back into the NHS. Guy's and St Thomas's took all their support staff back in house to get control of MRSA - and it worked. The hospital was the second

dirtiest in the country, now it is clean, with happier staff. If the trust is paying ISS enough money, via Meridian, then they should pay the staff directly. Fragmentation and out-sourcing only benefits the private shareholders.

## Arms firm bids for NHS contract

American arms firm Lockheed Martin is one of a list of multinationals sniffing around for NHS contracts. This weapons manufacturer has a long history of profiting from the misery of war. It now wants to profit from our suffering, disease and pain.

### Armistice Day Pause, 1937



LHW provides a forum for staff at the hospital to tell their stories and air their views. If you have a story to tell or an opinion to share then get in touch.

The bulletin is edited by healthcare professionals. All articles are published anonymously and we will ensure confidentiality is upheld. Email: hospitalworkerbulletin@gmail.com

# NHS strike: not just a protest rally.

If the strike were a protest outside the hospital, then it could be judged as a success. The community support for the workers at Lewisham was fantastic. Different campaigning groups showed support. The passing traffic sounded their horns. Multiple unions were present on the picket line, speeches were made and in the later hours it was a lively upbeat picket line.

But this was supposed to be a strike – a mass withdrawal of labour. In our last issue we criticised the exemptions at SLAM, that meant the unions encouraged most workers not to strike. At Lewisham there were only exemptions for A&E staff, and ward based midwives. The vast majority of union members should have been on strike. If they had been on strike it would, for four hours, have made a huge impact on the running of the hospital. The strength of the unions would have been felt by all. It would have reinforced the often hidden truth that management need us much more than we need management. But at Lewisham this didn't happen, most workers who should have been on strike went to work instead. The strike has been a rallying point for NHS workers who are concerned at what is happening to our health service. It has mobilised new activists who could play a role in rejuvenating the unions. But if we are to be successful then we all need to play a role in convincing others to join the strike movement. The GMB at QEH has demonstrated that a few people consistently talking and convincing can quickly snowball until hundreds are downing tools and using the power of solidarity to press for their demands. We need a similar approach now. But when "scabbing" happens in such large numbers it needs some explanation.

Here are some of the excuses for strikebreaking and some of our responses:

**Scab:** "I'm worried about what my manager will think"

**LHW:** "Grow a backbone – Christmas is coming and Spartacus will no doubt be on the tele. Watch it and

next time be prepared to say "I'm Spartacus" and lead your colleagues out the door.

**Scab:** "I'll have a backlog of work come I am"

**LHW:** You'll have more than a backlog of work to worry about if the Tories get their way. Try to think beyond the next ten seconds. Your workload has increased, your pay has decreased, patient care is getting worse. Stop whingeing and take action!

**Scab:** I'm worried about the effect on the patients.

**LHW:** See above.

**Scab:** I don't think the strike will change the minds of government.

**LHW:** Well it stands a better chance of changing the minds of government than your strategy of...erm...nothing. Going on strike isn't a spectator sport. By crossing our picket line you weaken us. By standing with us, you strengthen us.

**Scab:** "I didn't realise the strike was on"

**LHW:** Well maybe that's because your union is run by a couple of old bastards who can't possibly get around the whole hospital. Maybe you should become a rep.

**Scab:** "What's four hours going to achieve? Why is it only 1%?"

**LHW:** Our union leaders are extremely timid. But they won't get less timid if you break the strike. If you want stronger leadership then join us and together we can transform the union.

## Privatisation means:

Health and safety problems - The CQC found QEH had a problem managing clinical waste (this task is outsourced to ISS). Low pay: Most ISS staff don't receive a living wage, they don't even receive the lowest point on the NHS pay scale. Zero hours contracts: ISS apparently use zero hour contract workers, which is just another way to rob workers of rights. Bitterness: Private companies put their profits above all else. They squeeze this profit out of the lives of the workers with the old mantra: more work for less money.