



Lewisham

Issue 11 (6 March 2013)

Hospital Worker

A Workers' Liberty healthworkers' bulletin

www.workersliberty.org • awl@workersliberty.org • 0207 394 8923

Revolting in Unison



The Unison branch at Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust has led a courageous fight against downbanding, including several strikes. Can we turn our Unison branch around so it will fight cuts and closure?

As we go to press our Unison branch will be holding their AGM. 6 March is a very important day for ordinary Unison members at Lewisham Hospital because, as far as we can work out, this is the only day of the year that members get the chance to elect reps or discuss the policy of the branch.

To date, the branch committee's response to the threats to Lewisham hospital has been woefully inadequate. They have only held one members' meeting on the issue (with no opportunity to decide policy) and have not given one penny to the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign. They haven't even updated their noticeboard which still advertises the

successful battle to keep all our hospital services open.=

But there are some obstacles in the way. Allegedly, the incumbent branch secretary, Mike Davey — the man who emailed us all in December slagging off the community campaign — has said that there's nothing left to do here except to negotiate the redundancy packages. With "leaders" like him in charge, the chances of an about turn in Unison are slim. Unless hundreds of members spontaneously attend the AGM and effectively take over the branch, the self-defeating culture in Unison will remain. Normally we'd be the first to say we need to stick it out and win the union over. But with Kershaw's timetable we just don't have the time.

Hospital Worker is hoping for a mini revolution at the AGM. But if this doesn't happen a change of tactics is called for. We need a union that will actually support us in the fight to save our hospital.

Check back in our next bulletin for important news, because by next week the situation with the unions in this hospital will have changed one way or another!

SLH benefit gig

Thursday 21 March, 7pm @ The Stretch, Goldsmiths Students Union (Dixons Road).

Small victory on privatisation

Last week, using a smokescreen of secondary legislation (which does not need to be debated in public), the government tried to pass law to enforce the privatisation of the NHS.

Following a grassroots campaign that eventually managed to mobilise the top ranks of the Labour Party, the government has backed down and said it would redraft the legislation.

It is a small victory but the battle against privatisation has only just begun.

strike in November 2011!

Fortunately, an important motion has been submitted to the AGM calling on the branch committee to act on this issue. On the down side despite advance notice and polite enquiries, they don't seem to have circulated this to anyone in advance.

When they have held meetings — in November on Kershaw and in January on Agenda for Change — few people have attended. The branch struggles to mobilise more than 10 ordinary members out of a workforce of over 1,000 and a membership of some hundreds. Hopefully the AGM will be better, and will mark the start of a courageous new chapter in the life of Unison at Lewisham hospital, which will culminate in Unison members leading the way in a

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 and we will ensure confidentiality is upheld.



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Boris: on your Barclays bike!

When axe-man Matthew Kershaw came to Lewisham last December we were surprised he got out of the borough in one piece. Now Boris Johnson is trying his luck!

Johnson's appearance this week at the Broadway Theatre in Catford is an insult to our working-class community fighting to save our vital public services.

Johnson's latest foray into politics was to protect bankers' bonuses. When the EU tried to impose a mild cap on the multi-billion pound bonus culture, Johnson called it "moronic". He was keen that the bankers were properly "renumerated" for their hard word. But renumerated for what? What do the banks do that is so useful?

"Boris Bike" sponsors Barclays are a good example. Apart from fiddling the inter-bank lending rates, conning their customers with PPI and organising fraudulent deals with Arab oligarchs, Barclays is also a major player in the PFI market. Some of the "renumeration" that Boris wants

for Barclays' bankers will be money raised through closing down and selling off services at Lewisham Hospital.

When he isn't defending the indefensible banking industry, Johnson is cutting our services. The London Fire Authority recently rejected a proposal to close 12 fire stations in London, including Downham and New Cross. Johnson overruled them and insisted the cuts must go ahead!

For Johnson and his friends, working-class lives are cheap. But in response to his class hatred, what response to we have? Our Labour politicians like Heidi Alexander have supported the hospital campaign but also supports PFI. Steve Bullock backs the campaign, but has also imposed £28.3 million of cuts — including robbing 842 vulnerable people of their bus passes.

Boris' visit should be a wake up call. We need a workers' government that serves our class interests in the same way that the Tories and New Labour serve the boss class.



Nurse Karl

**With his finger
on the pulse of
industrial
unrest, our
bearded band 5
answers your
questions...**

**Dear Nurse Karl,
I used to work on London Underground before I started work at the hospital.**

We had a strong union, and on a few occasions I went on strike. We managed to win quite good pay, terms, and conditions and management knew they couldn't mess us around. But if Tube workers go on strike then it has a direct economic effect. If nurses strike, it just hurts patients. And if a union can't strike then ultimately it has no power.

What do you think?

Tasmin

**Dear Tasmin,
Strikes at hospitals can be organised effectively and safely.**

In 1986, Australian nurses took part in a 46 day continuous strike against attempts to cut their pay. The dispute brought to the fore a wide range of issues including career progression, the nurse-doctor relationship, and the

way that government policy was damaging patient care. The strike turned thousands of nurses into political activists and revived the union movement. They won a victory. Their movement grew and they went on to win legal minimum nurse-patient ratios in the early 1990s.

Throughout their dispute the nurses organised emergency cover under democratic control. The union was clear that they were fighting for the future of their health system and placed all the blame for declining patient care on the stubborn government.

However, strikes are not always the best tactic. When a hospital is threatened with closure a work-in (refusal to leave work after you've been sacked or redeployed) is a much more effective tactic. Some unions say that work-ins are illegal, but nobody has ever been prosecuted in this country for taking part in a work-in.

Another benefit of the work-in is that so long as there are patients in the hospital, the staff must be paid. So its financially much easier to sustain the action.

There is more info, including about the current use of work-ins by health workers in Greece and Spain, on our website: workersliberty.org

Nurse Karl