

**BUILDING OPPOSITION TO THE CUTS:** The cuts are highly ideological: 'public bad, private good' and the Con-Dem coalition cannot claim a mandate for them. Public protest is essential. Two dates to remember are Wednesday 20 October which will see protests against the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and Sunday 3 October when there will be a demonstration at the Tory Party Conference in Birmingham.

Newsletter of the Camden Unison Branch

# CAMDEN EYE



Number 20 ● August 2010

# Con-Dems light bonfire with jobs and services



The Emergency Budget that emerged from Chancellor

George Osborne's battered red box on 22 June amounts to the most serious attack in living memory on the public sector workforce and the services it provides. Though much of the detail remains scanty, the Government is demanding reductions in spending of 25%-40% across virtually all departments over the next three or so years. And it becomes clearer by the week that London local authorities are among the key targets for the Whitehall axe.

According to Robert Chote, director of the mainstream economic think-tank, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, 'The looming cuts to public services are likely to hit poorer households significantly harder than richer households.' For those of us of a less academic bent, the Budget amounted to little short of a declaration of class war that threatens to erode key pillars of the welfare state and effectively redistribute wealth away from large sections of the poor and the working class.

With the publication of Camden Council's own Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) on 14 July, we are beginning to learn how senior management locally will be translating drastic cuts in central Government funding into job losses and reductions in service provision during the lifetime of the recently elected Labour administration. The MTFS report makes for grim reading. It highlights a gap of some £26.3 million for the next financial year (2011-12) and outlines a programme of £16.6 millions of cuts and 'efficiency savings'. Overall, finance officers are now projecting a yawning gap of some £80 million - £100 million between next year and April 2014.

According to the report, which went to the Labour Cabinet on Wednesday 21 July, the implementation of Phase 1 of the local cuts programme will mean the loss of 270 full-time equivalent jobs. In UNISON's view this is likely to understate the real effects, given both the scale of spending cuts proposed and the fact that more than 25% of current Camden employees works

part-time. The scourge of further privatisation also features in the report, posing a threat to the jobs, pay and conditions of the existing workforce and almost inevitably worsening the quality of service provision.

In addition, the Emergency Budget and upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review will severely damage Camden's capital investment programme. The most dramatic example of the devastating impact of Government policy is, of course, the cancellation of funding for at least 13 projects in Camden under the aegis of Building Schools for the Future. While school pupils and staff in Camden in desperate need of new facilities are told there is no money, Education Secretary Michael Gove is somehow able to promise financial incentives to lure headteachers and governors into applying for elite Academy status and to promote the development of so-called 'free' schools outside of the state sector.

All this comes against the background of the current pay freeze - in effect sharp cuts in real pay - now pro-

jected to extend for at least another two years and the prospect of a major assault on the Local Government Pension Scheme over the course of the next year to 18 months. In short, the Con-Dem coalition is brewing up a toxic recipe for rising social tensions and industrial conflict.

As a UNISON branch, we must rise to the challenge by recruiting and organising on an unprecedented scale, and showing our willingness to resist whether through lobbies, marches or strike action over the weeks and months ahead. We can call on the Labour council to be an ally in the fights ahead, but must rely ultimately on our strength and solidarity from fellow trade unionists and the communities we live in and seek to serve.

Meanwhile, we ask Labour councillors in Camden and across London to give a lead by supporting a demonstration demanding the restoration of resources from central Government on Wednesday 20 October, the date of the Government Comprehensive Spending Review.

*George Binette*  
Branch Secretary

## Renewals: members want their questions answered



We held a shop meeting on the 29 June to discuss the management briefings held at The Pirate Castle where the current Interim Heads put forward their re-organisation proposals. Members felt that the questions they asked were not answered.

Members believe that Camden's Organisational Change Policy is not being followed and there was a lack of detail in the responses to their queries on the proposals.

It was a lively meeting and the questions raised have been forwarded to management. The turnout was good and many members who were unable to attend sent in their queries. There will be further meetings to discuss the responses.

Richard Loveridge  
Shop Steward HASC  
Jamestown Road

## 'All Pain No Gain': The case against cuts

We face a daily propaganda barrage that the cuts are inevitable, it's all Labour's fault and There Is No Alternative.

This short TUC pamphlet, 'All Pain No Gain', takes the Government's arguments and shreds them up. It suggests some alternatives.

It's not an in-depth analysis, but it covers a lot of points clearly in only 16 pages.

To download it go to <http://www.tuc.org.uk/> and search for 'All Pain No Gain'

The 21st National Hazards conference 2010 took place at the University of Keele from 9-11 July. Organised by the national Hazards Campaign, it is the biggest UK educational and campaigning event for trade union safety reps and activists. Camden UNISON delegates give a flavour of the conference below

## Fighting for a better world at work

Report by Philip Lewis, Vice chair, Camden UNISON



On Friday we had a presentation from FACK (Families Against Corporate Killers) it was called 'Face the Facks: the human cost of workplace killing'. This DVD had the place in total silence and there was not a dry eye in the house.

It deserves a widespread showing. I'd suggest every Health and Safety committee so that management can see the real cost of safety breaches, trade council public meetings (to gain public support for our campaign against the threatened ConDem cuts in Health and safety laws) and our own Branch Committee and shop stewards' committees.

More at: <http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/fack/>

Report from Lorna Blackman, Health & Safety Rep, Westminster-Kingsway College



The Hazards conference for 2010 was highly motivational, informative, supportive and engaging. The workshops were delivered by professional and highly experienced facilitators. The social networking enabled me to meet up with other Union reps/stewards and people who care about people. We were able to exchange ideas. There were testimonies from supporters of Blacklisted, a pressure group formed of Health and Safety reps. They have been blacklisted from working on building sites due to their commitment to ensuring building companies com-

ply with health and safety procedures. Other testimonies from those who have had family members killed at work due to employers not following health and safety legislation were shocking but gave some hope. In all I thoroughly enjoyed the conference and it has changed my life. When I arrived back at the work everyone noticed a difference in me. I came away from the conference convinced that as a safety rep I am not alone.

Report from Chikwe Ibeakanna, Health & Safety Rep, HASC



Keele University has a fantastic campus, a great environment for a conference. The conference itself was made up of a mixture of speakers, plenary sessions, campaigning meetings and comprehensive workshop programmes. I chose to attend among other workshops, the 'Doing a Workplace inspection', as this is an area that is mostly ignored in the workplace until something serious happens. The Health and Safety Commission believes it is good practice for employers and safety representatives to agree programmes of formal inspections in advance. These will also make it clear when each can expect an inspection to be carried out and would fulfil the requirement to give notice of quarterly inspections. Any changes to the planned timetable must be agreed to by both the employer and the health and safety representative.

More information on the conference at: <http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/hazardsconference/hazards2010bookingform.pdf>

For full report go to: <http://www.philewis.com/KEELE%202010.htm>

## UNISON MEETING FOR ALL SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF

5.00 pm, Thursday 30 September, Training Development Centre, 2nd Floor, Crowndale Centre

Action for national school conditions / Campaigning Against Cuts / Teaching Assistant grades under the new Job Evaluation Scheme

('Are you HLTA and not paid for it' survey launch).

For more information contact Hugo Pierre 020 7974 8036

## Fighting the housing benefit cuts



Housing privatisation options for the new coalition government are stalling.

They must decide whether or not to go ahead with the reform of Council Housing finance proposed by the last government – proposals which many councils criticise as underfunded. At the same time big cuts in Housing Benefit (HB) threaten council tenants as well as tenants of private landlords. And more cuts to national and council spending are looming.

Camden Tenants Fed, with Leeds Tenants Fed and others, have launched an 'Open Letter' against HB cuts which hit the poorest tenants, and will drive tenants out of inner

London, increase homelessness and evictions. Defend Council Housing campaigners will keep fighting for investment in existing and new council housing, resisting any attacks on secure tenancies and low rents. This now has to be linked in to the local and national campaigns against cuts.

Government pours billions of pounds of public money into the pockets of private landlords. If a fraction of that was invested into building new council housing each year more people would have secure homes they can afford.

We need to organise local meetings, and put pressure on councillors and MPs to reject these attacks. Councillors should refuse to implement cuts in housing benefit where they have

some discretion, over cuts for the unemployed and those with an extra bedroom.

Our broad united campaign of tenants, trade unions, councillors and MPs needs to mobilise to resist these attacks. We need to link with local and national resistance to cuts, and ensure tenants and the fight for council housing are part of that resistance. Eileen Short

More on the campaign against housing benefit cuts and the 'Open Letter' at: <http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/dch/>

Camden No Sell Offs/Defend Council Housing can be contacted via Camden Fed, 11-17 The Marr (off Camden Street), NW1 0HE. Tel 020 7383 2227

Photo: Phil Lewis



Course delegates support the National Hazards 'We didn't vote to die at work' campaign against the government attacks on workplace safety and health.

## Sickness Absence training



On 14 July about 20 branch Health & Safety reps attended Sickness Absence training, with Shamoona Sheikh, from Thompsons solicitors.

The GPs 'fit note' replaces the sick note and allows GP's to indicate that a person might be fit for some work under certain circumstances. Before this the GP could only say whether a person should or should not be in work.

The training also included information

on Camden's occupational health provider, Connaught, and disability and redeployment issues.

The representatives hope their training will put them in good stead when representing members at a time when some Camden managers may look to using the sickness absence procedure rather than redundancy as a cheap way of implementing job cuts.

Sarah Friday  
Branch Health & Safety Officer

## EYE VIEW

### Uniting for the common good

Working people face the biggest attack on the welfare state seen for a generation. We have to unite against an attack on all sides: jobs, pay, pensions, education, housing and health. The Trades Council meeting on Building Resistance to the cuts on 19 July was heartening. The turnout was good and the range of speakers impressive. We have to work out concretely what we can do to build unity and active opposition to the Con-Dem cuts. Meanwhile, within the branch we have to prioritise recruiting new members, developing stewards and improving union organisation.

### Afghanistan: Time to go

If public services have to be slashed because we have no money to pay for them, how come we can pay for the war in Afghanistan? The war now in its ninth year has cost the UK £8 billion besides the unquantifiable loss of life by soldiers and civilians.

The massive leaking of secret US military files has exposed the reality of a failing war that politicians and military realise they cannot win. Three quarters of the population now oppose the war. The demonstration on 20 November called by Stop the War, CND and BMI needs to be massive.

More at: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk)

# UNISON CONFERENCE

Greater Democracy – Fringe meeting

Over 300 delegates packed out a lunchtime 'Reclaim the Union' meeting to hear from elected UNISON representatives who have been witch hunted, suspended, barred from holding office and expelled from UNISON. Speakers included Yunnus Bakhsh, Caroline Beadale and Glenn Kelly.

All speakers were met with huge applause when calling for the National leadership of UNISON to campaign against the vicious attacks on public sector workers. Too much of the time and resources of our union have been spent on picking fights with UNISON activists prepared to lead that fight.

Speakers made the point that the current leadership had failed to organise a real fight to defend members under New Labour. Now was the time for our union to show that we are united in our ability to take on the Tory/Lib Dem government and throw our full force against them rather than carry on the internal attacks on left wing activists.

## Con-Dem attacks inspire fighting talk

There was a certain air of unreality at the start of the week as delegates from UNISON's twelve regions and seven service groups gathered in Bournemouth for the union's annual conference. After all, the motions and amendments on the agenda all pre-dated the May general election and had very little to say about the attacks on the public sector workforce and its workforce unleashed by the coalition government since its creation.

Even so, the spectre of pay freezes, savage spending cuts, eroded pensions and Academy schools featured time and again in speeches and coffee bar conversations throughout the week. The undoubted anger seemed, however, to lack both a focus and a sense of urgency until the final morning.

An emergency motion, submitted by our branch, helped to lift the conference's mood on the final day as it along with a similar motion from Tower Hamlets spurred leading

**The undoubted anger seemed, however, to lack both a focus and a sense of urgency until the final morning**

lights on the National Executive Council (NEC) into drafting their own proposals during the course of the week. The result was a lengthy composite resolution (proposed by the NEC and incorporating Camden's call for protests to greet the Emergency Budget unveiled by Chancellor George Osborne on 22 June) that gained unanimous approval from the more than 2,000 delegates assembled in Bournemouth's conference centre. Discussion of the resolution probably took no

more than 15 minutes of the conference's four days, but more than anything else during the course of the week it helped galvanise a united sense of opposition to the unashamedly Thatcherite agenda, which the coalition government seems determined to pursue, whatever the consequences for the fragile economic recovery.

The question now is whether we – and that really does mean all of UNISON's membership here in Camden and across Britain – can translate the fiery rhetoric of the final day at Bournemouth into effective action. We have very little alternative but to do so since if the Con-Dem coalition does not meet unprecedented resistance we are left to contemplate the prospect of:

- at least 600,000 fewer public sector jobs in five years time;
- swingeing cuts to real pay and the value of our pensions, and
- a dramatic erosion of social welfare provision and
- a still more unequal society where corporation tax falls and VAT rises.

As the public sector's biggest union, UNISON with some 1.4 million members across services that are now on the firing line as never before in our working lives is now committed to a programme to resist including the possibility of a national demonstration on 29 September as part of a European-wide day of action against austerity programmes. For us in Camden this will involve maximising the pressure on the Labour council to act as our ally rather than as the executor of the cuts programme, advancing the arguments for democratically accountable public services and alternatives to the cuts at every turn, taking to the streets to demonstrate in the autumn and almost certainly to the picket line in the not too distant future.

George Binette  
Branch Secretary



5,000 people marched through Tower Hamlets on 20 June in a huge show of unity and defiance against the racist English Defence League (EDL). It had boasted it would march in the borough but backed off as the scale of opposition grew. The exuberant, diverse and overwhelming young demonstration was organised by Unite Against Fascism and United East End. More at [www.uaf.org.uk](http://www.uaf.org.uk)

Photo: Pete Ainsley

## My first UNISON Local Government Conference



Wow, I've never seen so many activists all in one place, a little scary but I was pretty safe with my Camden crew of Branch Secretary, convenors and other stewards who have all done this before.

I arrived on Saturday afternoon, the sun was blazing and I thought I could try and enjoy a bit of Bournemouth before the hectic two days start... I couldn't have been more wrong. My crew failed to tell me that the work started as soon as we got there, regardless of when the conference started.

There was a pre-conference meeting where we discussed the agenda for the first day. Were there any motions that any of us completely disagreed with or wanted to speak on?

We attended a couple of fringe meetings that went on into late evening. I had a drink or so before heading off to my room for a well deserved rest.

The next morning was an early start: breakfast at 8:00 am and then on to conference for 9:30 am. It was all a little overwhelming, having to follow other delegation members' leads and taking in all that there was to be discussed and voted on. Our branch's

main aim was to make UNISON a fighting union once again and restore our members' faith in it.

Talking to delegates from other branches and regions the contention was the same. We want to restore some of the union power that has been lost over the years, especially with the current inexperienced coalition government.

We passed many motions to fight cuts in public sector jobs and, more importantly, services that will inevitably affect the public the most.

I was sharing the two roles of delegate and observer with Barry Walden. It took me a little while to understand how this worked and when I could vote

Both Mandy Berger and Phoebe Watkins spoke confidently and inspirationally. I was encouraged to speak but I copped out.

All in all it was a good experience. I was energised and excited. I would recommend it to new stewards, especially so that they can get an insight into how they fit within the larger union, engage in creating networks, listen to different opinions and generally have a great time. Cos it wasn't all work I promise!

Darshana  
Yadav-Miller  
HASC



Photo: Hugo Pierre

## No mandate to cancel school re-building projects



Camden's project to rebuild the secondary and special schools has been hit hard. Eleven out of fourteen projects have been stopped and the remaining three are not certain.

Before the election David Cameron was crystal clear that Building Schools for the Future (BSF) would continue after the election. 'We believe Building Schools for the Future is a good policy. The money is there for it to continue. We want to build new schools.' David Cameron, 26 April 2010

So Michael Gove does not have a mandate for his cancellation of 715 school re-building projects. Not only does it break Cameron's pre-election pledge but it breaks George Osborne's promise in last month's Budget that 'there will be no further reductions in capital spending totals'. It is also clear how ideological this cut is, because building new academies gets first preference over refurbishing existing schools.

Gove has now claims that the Treasury had not agreed to fund the the BSF programme and that the government's finances were worse than expected. Neither of these claims is true.

David Bell, the top civil servant at the Department for Education, wrote in July, confirming that the Treasury had approved the whole of the BSF programme. At the end of May, the Office of National Statistics published figures showing that the government's finances are better than expected and that they will need to borrow £11bn less than was previously thought this year. The annual cost of the BSF programme is £1bn.

The cuts to government expenditure will not only result in students and teachers continuing to work in sub-standard school buildings but they threaten the economic recovery. The construction industry is concerned that tens of thousands of jobs will be lost. Last week, the IMF cut their forecast for Britain's economic growth blaming government cuts.

So Gove's cut to BSF breaks promises by both David Cameron and George Osborne, and endangers the economic recovery. Given all these facts, it is not surprising that this cut has generated outrage across the country.

Andrew Baisley  
Camden NUT branch  
secretary



Photo: Pete Atkinson



Photo: Sinead McLoughlin



Photo: Phoebe Watkins



Photo: Helene McKersie

Protests against the Emergency Budget cuts 22 June. Clockwise: The Crowndale Centre, St Argyle's Primary, St Dominic's Primary and Camden Town Hall

## School's out for summer – So much for the S.....ssnb?



To say the future of the SSSNB (school support staff negotiating body) hangs in the balance is to put it mildly. Now with Labour out of the running and a Cami-nickers (a popular term at conference!) government, let's say it has not been thrown out, out of hand, but what of its future? Guess we'll just have to wait and see.

**Suffer little children...**  
Motion 34 – relating to medical administration in

schools - has been a hot topic for a while now, and one that also came up in our April conference in London. The facts are simple: untrained and inexperienced support staff are expected to administer (is cajoled too strong a term?) medication/ medical equipment that health workers wouldn't touch with a barge pole! Of course UNISON supports inclusion but is peg-feeding, clearing tracheotomy tubes and generally administering medicines that a nurse should be giving really a bright idea?

Does it benefit the vulnerable 'patient'? Does it benefit the unprotected worker? I say no and no again. UNISON supported the motion to call for clear national protocols on medical procedures in schools, colleges and nurseries.

**The 'B' Factor.**  
Motion 31 pertaining to absence monitoring and measurement in local Government is a great concern for the female work force. Using the 'Bradford factor' scoring system, this means that people who are off for a short period of time but more frequently fare worse, or get a harsher score, than those who are off for a longer absence. For example 10 one-day absences would score 1000 points, while one ten-day absence would score only 10 points. Sounds a little crazy? We think so.

This scoring system is also used when deciding on redundancies and dismissals. This not only detrimentally affects women with menstrual problems, but those with pregnancy-

related, menopausal ones etc. Is it wrong to expect, that being responsible for the fruition of the next generation, we should be cut some slack here?

Conference called upon the local government service group executive to work with relevant bodies to alert branch negotiators, equality reps and officers and enable them to redress this imbalance. I move.

**Work for nothing. Sounds silly doesn't it?**  
On a more general note Christina McAnea (UNISON Education) urged us all to put an end to the 'work for nothing culture' which is almost the bedrock of many schools. This involves countless support staff working outside contractual hours with no extra pay. Let's face it, is any business going to pay for a service they can get for free? It's up to us all to smile brightly and say 'I'm happy to do it if I am paid at the appropriate rate'.

Leisa De Burca  
Schools Steward

## UNISON action to demand National conditions for school staff

UNISON has been negotiating a new national contract for all school support staff. The new coalition Government has stalled negotiations and given no indication as to whether they want to continue - they have opposed national conditions of service in the Academies Bill being rushed through Parliament.

UNISON will be conducting a national ballot, probably in mid-September, of all school staff for limited industrial action. This would take the form of a work-to-rule. Make sure your membership details are up-to-date. Email changes to paul.england@camden.gov.uk or go to [www.unison.org.uk/help/index.asp](http://www.unison.org.uk/help/index.asp)

Hugo Pierre, Camden Unison CSF, Co-Convenor



'The basic state pension remains amongst the lowest and least adequate in Europe' says the National Pensioners Convention's £1 pamphlet 'The politics of pensions'. With pensions again under renewed attack, Kiran Patel, UNISON observer on the pensions sub committee, outlines some of its key points

# The politics of pensions

The right to live in a poverty-free old age is an important one. Over a hundred years ago the trade union movement led the campaign for the first ever state pension. In 1948 National Insurance and the basic state pension was introduced.

### What is the plight of pensioners today?

In 2009 it is estimated that the number of older people considered to be living below the officially recognised poverty line (£165 a week before housing cost) is a staggering 2.5 million. The state pension is a major source of income for two thirds (63%) of pensioner households.

### What is the current state Pension?

Basic State Pension (single) £97.65  
Basic State Pension (wife based on husband's contribution) £58.50  
Basic State Pension (Couple) £156.15

### What about occupational Pensions?

According to the Department of Work and Pensions, the average amount received from an occupational pension per week is £68 for a single

pensioner and £153 for a couple.

### What about the future?

Since 1997, the government has pursued a policy of reversing the ratio of pension provision, from 60% state and 40% private, to 40% state and 60% private. An estimated 5 million workers currently pay into defined contribution/money purchase schemes. With share values plunging, a £100,000 pension pot which would have previously bought a monthly income of £620, will now buy just £490. The average pension pot of around £25,000 is likely to produce an income of £160 per month. 87% of the private sector final salary pension schemes have closed to new entrants. The proposed National Employee Saving Trust (NEST) for the lower paid is also unlikely to help as the vast majority will either be unable to afford contributions or will receive so little that it won't be worth their while even starting.

To top it all, pensioners in the UK receive, on average, a state retirement income worth 30% of their salary compared to the European average of 60%. It is foolish to expect pri-

vate sector providers to consider future pensioners' needs above their profits. That is why decent state pensions are worth fighting for.

Pamphlet available from National Pensioners Convention, 19 – 23 Ironmonger Row, London, EC1V 3QN. Phone: 020 7553 6510. Their useful website is at: [www.npcuk.org](http://www.npcuk.org)

### UPDATE

Since the pamphlet was produced the Government has decided that:

- From April 2011 the basic state pension will be re-linked with earnings and will increase every year by the highest of earnings, inflation or 2.5%.
- Public service pensions will increase in line with the consumer price index (CPI) rather than the retail price index (RPI). The CPI increase is usually lower than RPI so this will have a detrimental effect.
- A commission chaired by John Hutton will review public sector pensions. There will also be consultation on scrapping default retirement age.
- The rise in the state pension age to 66 will be accelerated.

### Improve the state pension by

**Increasing the basic state pension to the official poverty level – £165 per week in 2009**

**Indexing the basic state pension to average earnings or prices whichever is the greater**

### Ways to pay for it could include

**Abolishing the upper earnings limit of £43,888 on National Insurance contributions, ending the injustice in which the higher paid contribute a smaller proportion of earnings than the lower paid. This would raise £10 billion a year.**

**Reform the tax relief on private pensions. This costs the Treasury £37 billion a year with the richest 1% of tax payers receiving around 25% of the rebate.**

**Using the existing surplus balance of £54 billion in the National Insurance Fund as part of the pay-as-you-go scheme**



There's strength in numbers:

# JOIN CAMDEN UNISON

With over 3,500 members Camden UNISON is the largest union in the council. If you are worried about your job in a re-structure, stressed by your workload, having trouble with your manager, worried about outsourcing, have health and safety concerns or are anxious that there is a decent pay settlement this year then you are better off in the union than without. Fight together with others – don't struggle alone. Phone the branch office on 020 7974 1633 or email: paul.england@camden.gov.uk More information at: www.unison.org.uk

## CAMDEN EYE TEAM

**Editor:** Pete Ainsley, Children, Schools & Families

**Newsletter Team:** Pete Ainsley, George Binette, Phil Lewis, Jonathan Marsh

*Want to get involved?* We need writers, cartoonists, photographers.

Email: peter.ainsley@camden.gov.uk

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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of Camden UNISON, but the branch will defend the right of members to express those views.

**UNISON**  
the public service union

# Handing over your health service

Change, change, change - aren't things bad enough already? Clearly Andrew Lansley, Health Secretary, doesn't think so. While in opposition he criticized Labour for repeated and pointless reorganisations of the NHS and promised that he would leave it alone. But he has launched a White Paper (Liberating the NHS) proposing the most profound reorganisation of the service since its inception in 1948. Either the Coalition document failed to tell the truth or this massive shake up was concocted in less than 6 weeks.

At the heart of the proposals are GP commissioning, and an increased role for the private sector. This has predictably been dressed up in fine words, with talk of putting patients and GPs in the driving seat of the service and improving outcomes through increased 'choice' and 'contestability'. But what lies behind the rhetoric?

GP commissioning entails handing over £80 billion of the NHS budget to family doctors to buy health care for their patients. Many GPs have already indicated that they have no interest in the massive and complex challenge of commissioning. They have neither the time nor the expertise to supervise the management, accountancy and data analysis involved in buying healthcare for their local population.

Fortunately the last government had already set up FESC (Framework for External Support for Commissioners) which consists of commercial companies who will do this work for them. Thus private companies will finally get their hands on billions of pounds of the NHS budget to buy care from other private companies, who will increasingly be involved in delivering NHS clinical care under the government's 'any willing provider' policy. Has anyone noticed a possible conflict of interest here?

Hospitals must all become Foundation Trusts and, along with their staff, will lie outside the NHS. Those who fail – both hospitals and GP commissioning bodies – will be eliminated, as 'there will be no bailouts of organisations which overspend public budgets'.

These proposals amount to nothing less than an accelerating privatisation of the NHS to the point where it becomes nothing more than an organisation buying care from a hotchpotch of competing and unaccountable private companies. Labour, of course, did the ground work by dismantling the safeguards that protected the service, but the new White Paper will lead to a legislated stampede of the private sector into the service. One private sector director has already predicted that this could lead to 'the de-nationalisation of health-

care services in England'. Others have described it as an 'evisceration of the NHS'.

Those who can't see what all the fuss is about need look no further than the USA. President Obama, supported by the two thirds of Americans in favour of a public option, had a mandate to push through much needed healthcare reforms. He and they were thwarted by the massive US medical industrial complex, which spent a million dollars a day to resist change. Those same companies, many of whom have been successfully indicted for fraud, are now being shown the red carpet to come and run our NHS. Do we think they will behave any differently here?

There was no electoral mandate for the changes proposed in this White Paper. There is no evidence for them and despite the rhetoric there has been no consultation. There will be no pilot. They will allow the government to distance itself from unpopular decisions on cuts and closures of local services, open wide the door to the private sector and divide the profession.

This is a dangerous ideological experiment which puts at risk the NHS and those who depend on it.

● This article originally appeared in the *Camden New Journal*

Dr Jacky Davis  
(personal capacity)

## Camden Trades Council: Building resistance to cuts

19 July saw the council chamber packed for a Trades Council discussion on how to resist the cuts. Speakers included local MP Frank Dobson, who said Camden had the highest number of turndowns of BSF schools and the capping of Housing Benefit would hit Camden hard. Imran Khan spoke on the

importance of Legal Aid while Tracy Edwards highlighted the £128 billion of tax evaded or avoided since 2008 and her union's work with the Tax Justice Network. Andrew Baisley produced a brilliant attack on the cutbacks in BSF and the lies used to justify it, Raj Chada argued we needed to provide an alternative,

a coalition of the Left. Alex Gordon spoke of transport cutbacks and how the privatisers profited. Candy Udwin talked of the need for the kind of resistance seen by public service and other workers in Greece.

These were followed by contributions from the floor. It was a good start to developing a collective opposition.