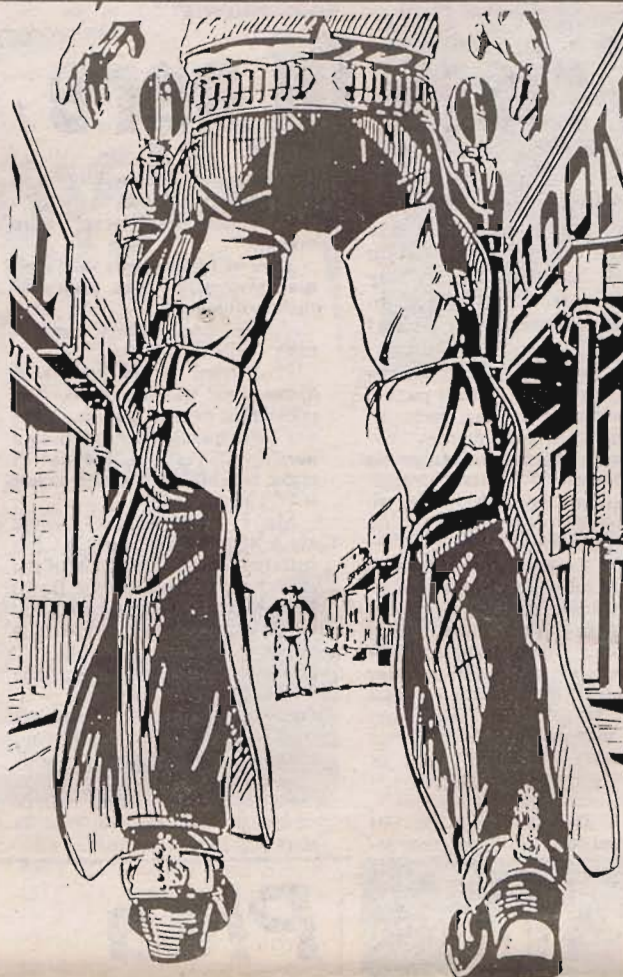




PHOTO: John Chapman

# COMPETITION COMES TO THE HEALTH SERVICE!



# Protests at privatisation

HEALTH workers in Paddington, Ealing and Hounslow & Spelthorne DHAs have taken one-day strike action against job losses and privatisation in the last month.

● In Ealing, the DHA voted on July 10 to sack their whole domestic workforce at Ealing, Perivale and community hospitals. Private firms Mediclean and Blue Arrow will move in. COHSE has said that nursing staff will refuse to cover for work previously done by domestics.

Mediclean, who have won the Ealing Hospital contract, are attempting to head off opposition by interviewing redundant NHS staff and offering some of them employment.

● In Paddington, workers of all grades walked out on July 19 in protest at the privatisation of catering and domestic services. The catering contract is only the fourth in the whole country to go out to a private firm, and the first to go to Compass services, a subsidiary of Grand Metropolitan.

● At West Middlesex Hospital, other grades joined in action alongside hospital drivers on July 22, protesting against compulsory redundancies and against the massive cut in jobs and working hours imposed under the "successful" in-house tender.

But when strikers and campaigners attempted to gain access to the "public" meeting of Hounslow & Spelthorne DHA, which was to decide on the contract, they found the front doors locked. They made their way in through another entrance: but when COHSE official Pete Mar-

shall attempted to put the union's point of view, the DHA's (Labour) Chair Thelma Golding called in the police!

With the public and the workforce excluded, the DHA went on to agree the in-house tender involving 42 redundancies among W. Middlesex domestics, and a cut of 2,500 cleaning hours each week. The work rate to be imposed would normally attract a bonus payment of 33%: no bonus will be paid.

Local COHSE secretary Ian Smith said:

"This major reduction in hours will cut standards to an absolute minimum. I predict that the West Middlesex will be filthy within 3 months."

In a formal letter of protest to the DHA chair, Pete Marshall complains that denying the unions the right even to put their views and using the police to prevent him speaking

"puts you firmly in the camp of people such as the governments of Poland, Chile and South Africa, where basic freedom of speech is denied."

The latest Hounslow attacks on jobs follow 80 sackings at South Middlesex Hospital, 270 sackings at Ashford and 100 redundancies proposed across all grades of staff.

## HHS under threat

PRIVATE contractors Hospital Hygiene Services — one of whose directors is Tory MP and leading privateer Marcus Fox — made history in the NHS earlier this year when they became the first firm to be given their marching orders in mid-contract, by Bromley DHA.

Angry management gave up after six months of vain efforts to force the firm to adhere to contract standards, and then gave them 3 hours to get off the hospital premises.

Now another DHA, Oxford, is publicly denouncing the firm's failure to maintain hygiene standards, the HHS has been given until September 4 to improve conditions or lose their contract at the Radcliffe Infirmary.

Administrator David Wilson told the local free newspaper the *Oxford Star* that:

"Their standards are totally unacceptable and I am very worried about it." HHS has been removed from Oxfordshire region's list of approved contractors.

In the Radcliffe, nurses have been forced to give ad-hoc training to raw recruited domestic staff; elderly patients have been left without drinks; food left uncovered; laundry and nappies left in untouched heaps on wards; and floors left uncleaned.

Terms and conditions offered by HHS are much worse than the NHS, and nearly one third of the 105 staff taken on had left within the first 10 weeks of the contract beginning in April.

The Radcliffe scandal — a symptom of profit-seeking firms slashing NHS standards — is further evidence for those fighting privatisation in the NHS.

ONLY three DHAs in England are still holding out against privatisation of ancillary services — all of them in London. Brent, Greenwich and Lewisham are the last surviving rebels.

NUPE reports that by June 30, 177 domestic contracts had been awarded, with only 70 retained in-house and 107 going to private companies. Of 56 laundry contracts awarded, only 18 have gone to outside firms, while the private sector has captured only 4 out of 46 catering contracts.

## Who are RCO?

ANOTHER unfamiliar name among firms competing for NHS contracts in London is RCO Contract Services Ltd, who won what was widely regarded as a "loss leader" contract to clean clinics in Wandsworth, only to fail at the first hurdle in tendering for Wandsworth's lucrative Springfield Hospital contract.

NUPE researchers tell us that the managing director and largest shareholder of RCO's parent company RCO Holdings is one A.G. Raven: the firm has only 27 shareholders.

Though in 1983 the company's annual report looked forward to expanding NHS work, RCO has lost out to larger firms and won only a handful of contracts. The largest of these is Winwick

Hospital in Warrington, where RCO slashed the previous workforce by 55 to bid £137,000 cheaper than the in-house tender. Redundant NHS staff were told that with reductions in holiday and sick pay they would lose out even if RCO offered them jobs.

RCO also operate in Oxford's Churchill Hospital, where conditions for staff are so poor cleaners have been bused in from as far afield as Coventry to make up the numbers.

RCO may not give much to its staff — but the 27 shareholders carved up a thumping £500,000 between them last year in a dividend 60% up on 1983; directors' payments went up 14%. Staff pay increased by an average of 5%.

## Blue Arrow on target?

A NEW and unwelcome name among the firms jockeying for a profitable slice of NHS ancillary work is "Blue Arrow", which has just won its first NHS contract — for cleaning Ealing DHA's community hospitals.

COHSE researchers tell us that the little-known firm is run by Tony Berry, formerly a director of the Brengreen group which runs the better-known Exclusive cleaners.

Berry had been a childhood chum of Brengreen boss David Evans, but in 1981 the two fell out, and Berry was sacked. Though ousted from the board, he did not go empty handed: his "golden handshake" was a cool £150,000, and he also dumped

716,000 of his 816,000 shares in Brengreen on to the stock market, netting another £350,000.

He has since become chair and chief executive of Blue Arrow, which as recently as March this year decided to rename its Blue Arrow Industrial Services to Blue Arrow Cleaning Group, and begin competing directly against Exclusive for NHS contracts.

Of course Blue Arrow has experience to offer: but not much to do with hospitals. The combine operates employment agencies, holiday and business travel agencies and management consultancy. So if you don't like your dirty ward in Ealing they can offer you a holiday to get away from it all!

## Finger on PULSE

HAD you noticed that "union propaganda opposing the use of private contractors for local and health authority services" had "gone unchallenged"?

Had you been offended by the "distorted claims of the public sector unions, the TUC and the Labour Party" making all the running in the media?

If you suffered from such delusions you can now rest easy. A shadowy campaign, founded by two members of the Tory Party, and backed by a range of right wing organisations including the hard-line anti-union Freedom Association and a number of contract firm employers, has now begun to pump out its own propaganda in favour of privatisation.

The so-called "Public and Local Service Efficiency Campaign" (PULSE) has not surprisingly had swift success in achieving coverage in sympathetic right wing newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* — where the hand of PULSE was detected behind a vicious ½ page attack on the Barking Hospital strike.

But campaigners and health unions should keep a close watch at local level, where orchestrated spates of "readers' letters" to newspapers along with other pro-privatisation publicity are beginning to make an appearance, and call for a prompt reply by defenders of the NHS.

PULSE offers free membership to students, and seeks membership applications from contract firms, Chambers of Commerce, small business associations and members and officials of councils and health authorities.



## What you get

ed. It would also have an even worse effect on the Medical Schools who could lose a large section of their workforce and so, in consequence, a large part of their resources.

At the moment — waiting lists permitting — patients get the treatment they need. If they need physiotherapy for two weeks, they get it. If the treatment is stopped it is because they are cured or the doctor feels in his/her clinical judgement that it is ineffective.

But under clinical budgetting, heads of department may very well dictate that since their budget is overspent, patients

will only get a certain amount of treatment — cured or not. Patients needing attention at the beginning of a financial year might find it easier to get full treatment than those who arrive the following winter when funds are running low.

As with other varieties of "cash limit", the concept of clinical budgetting takes clinical judgements out of the hands of the medical, paramedical and nursing staff trained to make them — and gives the whip hand to administrators and glorified accountants whose only concern is to balance the books.