

PUBLIC SERVICE ACTION

Action Organising Information Contractors New threats

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Statutory Tendering GOVERNMENT ORDERS CONTRACT BONANZA

The government has launched a new drive to substantially increase contracting out services in local authorities, the National Health Service and the civil service. The first stage of this new attack on public services was the publication of a Green Paper (Competition in the Provision of Local Authority Services, DOE) in February 1985.

All local authorities will be forced to put a wide range of services out to tender and will be obliged to seek comparative prices from private firms for professional and technical services.

These proposals alone will have a far reaching effect on local government. When combined with rate capping, grant penalties, abolition, further cuts in public spending, and the privatisation of public transport they will fundamentally affect the range and quality of services, jobs, wages and working conditions, and the very nature of local public services in Britain.

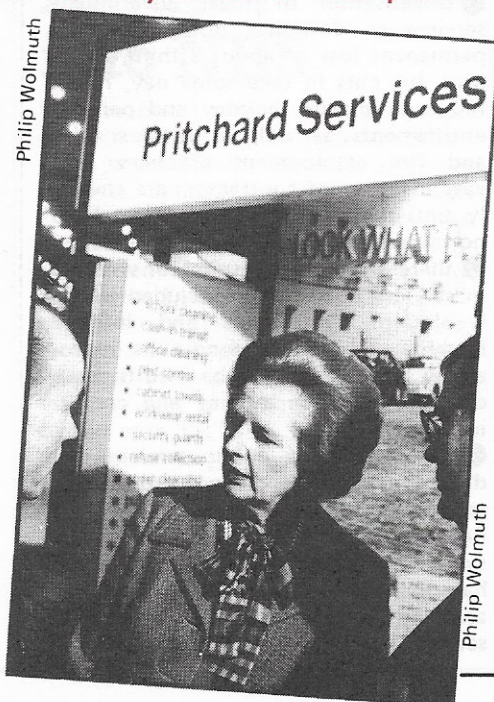
They will hit both manual and white collar workers. Services or jobs not specifically mentioned in the Green Paper could well be included in the legislation or added by the government under sweeping new powers. The government is just as concerned to achieve wage cuts, fewer public sector jobs, weaker trade union organisation, changes in working practices, further divisions between workers, management, councillors and users, and a climate of fear created by the process of privatisation, as it is in opening up new markets to private firms.

THE NEW PROPOSALS — A CONTRACTORS CHARTER

Statutory tendering will be introduced for the following services to take effect probably in April or October 1986:

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Philip Wolmuth



Philip Wolmuth

MEALS-ON-



WHEELS BY TAXI IN THATCHER'S PATCH

In Thatcher's Finchley constituency, part of the London Borough of Barnet, 75 per cent of meals on wheels are now delivered by taxis and minicabs. It is costing the council £35,000 annually in cab fares.

In the last six months 691 of the 3120 rounds in the borough (22 per cent overall) have been delivered by taxi. Cab drivers charge £22.50 per round of about 30 meals. There have been instances where the meal has been pushed through the letterbox. This method of delivery eliminates the very important contact with older people.

Thatcher's beloved volunteers are in short supply in her own constituency. Meals on wheels are delivered by WRVS volunteers but they are having increasing difficulty in getting enough people to do it. Many of the volunteers are older than those receiving the meals — some volunteers are reported to be over 80 years old. The council has regularly denied that it is using taxis on such a scale. Labour councillors are repeating their demands that the service be properly run by direct labour.

Cont. from p1 CONTRACT BONANZA

- refuse collection and street cleansing including special events such as summer festivals.

- cleaning of buildings by staff who are specifically employed as cleaners on a full or part time basis. Cleaning in local authority residential homes and day centres may be excluded together with cleaning work which is incidental to general duties, for example caretakers and home helps.

- maintenance of parks, open spaces and playing fields including highway verges and landscaped areas on housing estates and council buildings. Grass cutting, weeding, maintenance of cricket pitches, tennis courts, hedging, ditching, fencing, pitch marking, tree surgery and other maintenance work will have to go out to tender.

- vehicle maintenance including cars, vans, trucks, specialised vehicles and equipment.

- school meals and catering in colleges, town halls, conference centres and other public buildings and will include supplies, preparation and delivery. Catering in old people's homes and meals on wheels may be excluded. Meals on Wheels will inevitably be included in areas where they are provided by school kitchens.

The legislation will be similar to that for DLO's under the Local Government, Land and Planning Act 1980 but with significant additional powers. Local authorities will be forced to submit detailed tenders 'on exactly the same basis as outside competitors', keep separate accounts for different categories of work, and publish annual reports and accounts. School meals and all services covered by the proposed legislation will have to make a profit — the 5 per cent rate of return used for DLO's is likely to be the starting figure.

SWEEPING NEW GOVERNMENT CONTROLS

New laws will make it illegal for local authorities to impose conditions or standing orders unless they are 'directly related to the required performance by the contractor... in respect of the quality, timing or cost of the specified goods or services'. This will exclude all conditions concerning wages, benefits and employment practices other than statutory health and safety controls. The government could apply these new controls on contract compliance to DLO's before the legislation is introduced for other services.

- specify and vary services which will have to go out to tender.
- vary the rate of return or profit.
- force local authorities to re-tender if the government believes that there has been 'unfair' competition.
- direct the local authority to award contracts to firms unless the council



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submits the lowest tender.

- prevent the council employing its own workforce if the government believes that a local authority is repeatedly imposing unreasonable requirements on contractors or consistently refuses to accept the lowest tender in favour of its own department's bid.

Some form of phased introduction of tendering will be used either on a percentage of work or expenditure. Only very small sections will be exempt. The government is firmly committed to extending the 'compulsory competition regime to all authorities as soon as practicable.' For example, all refuse collection is expected to be within the scope of the legislation within three years of its introduction. Local authorities will determine the length of contracts which will vary between 1-5 years.

What it will mean

DEVASTATING EFFECTS ON WORKERS AND USERS

- privatisation of local government services to date has resulted in the permanent loss of about a third of the jobs, big cuts in take-home pay, much reduced sickness, holiday and pension entitlements as well as ruthless hire and fire employment practices. The vast majority of contractors are strongly anti-union and most workers have no trade union organisation.

- there will be no respite for workers in services not initially included in the legislation. Wage cuts and inferior benefits and working conditions imposed by contractors will be used to keep down local authority pay and conditions.

- the quality of public services will decline as contractors fines and failures spread to other services. Firms like Pritchards Services, International Servisystem, Academy Cleaners and others have already been thrown out of schools and parks for failing to provide a basic service. Many others have been heavily

TESTING THE MARKET

Local authorities will have to 'test the market' by carrying out 'value for money comparisons' for a wide range of professional and technical services. The Secretary of State will have powers to include these services in the compulsory tendering category at any time. The Green Paper proposes that councils will have to establish the full cost of their existing service, invite firms to quote a price for doing the work, and make all this information public. Architects, legal, quantity surveying, management of leisure centres, data processing, printing and car parking are specifically mentioned. The Green Paper recognises that many more could be listed and no doubt will be included in legislation or subsequent circulars.

fined for failing to meet standards.

- job and equal opportunities for women and ethnic minorities will be further eroded when employment conditions imposed on contractors are made illegal.

- there will be considerable knock-on effects both within and between departments. For example contractors in parks and gardens will use their own source of supply for plants and equipment. Fewer support staff will be needed to directly run services, order supplies and prepare wages and bonus payments.

- badly needed resources to improve services and jobs will be squandered on switching staff to prepare and process tenders and supervise contractors. The AMA calculated that the original tendering laws for DLO's which came into effect in 1981 led to the employment of more estimators, inspectors and technicians increasing DLO costs by 7 per cent.

- it will mean less effective and less efficient services with less flexibility to respond to changing needs and circumstances. Most contractors find it

difficult meeting the terms of the contract let alone any changes or additions — unless of course there were clear financial incentives.

- workers not included in statutory tendering will feel the full impact of further cuts in public spending because services contracted out will be exempt from cuts because the council will be legally bound to pay contractors.
- there will be fewer opportunities and it will be more difficult for workers and users to set up joint committees and take joint action to improve and expand services.
- conflicts of interest will heighten as some officers, and in some cases councillors, try to manoeuvre or are enticed into jobs with contractors. Others may believe they can set up their own businesses or co-ops to 'win' contracts.

DEVASTATING EFFECT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- 'just another contractor competing for the job in question' is how the government views the future role of council departments. They will be forced to run on business lines with money and numbers dominating but social needs and the quality of services further relegated down the political agenda.
- free competition is a complete myth because contractors can pick and choose where they operate, select which work to bid for, cross-subsidise different activities, and can freely diversify into other activities. Stringent operating and accounting rules and procedures are imposed on local authorities which would never be accepted by the private sector.
- statutory tendering will give multinational companies including overseas firms better security for their investment and more identifiable markets worth several billions of pounds annually. There is likely to be another spate of takeovers and mergers. Evidence from America and Canada shows that multi-



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Action now

We need a national campaign by trade unions and local authorities to defeat these proposals. The opportunities are much greater and clearer compared to the rate capping campaign. There is already mounting evidence of the effect on services, contractors increasing fines and failures, and their ruthless employment practices.

Campaigns locally and nationally must focus on a combination of all the following tactics:

- develop alternative plans to improve and expand public services to shift the terrain of the struggle and debate onto social needs and the quality and effectiveness of services.
- prepare education and propaganda materials exposing contractors fines, failures, pay and conditions, and detailing the case for public service.
- build stronger workplace organisa-

tions and links with workers in other councils and the private sector

national firms will soon dominate with disastrous consequences for workers and users (see Fines, Failures and Illegal Practices in North America, NUPE/SCAT, February 1985).

firms and employers organisations like the CBI and Chambers of Commerce are likely to use the 'value for money comparisons' to put in loss leader bids and to intensify their attack on 'overspending', 'high' business rates and public services in general.

public accountability will be greatly reduced because statutory tendering will add another tier of bureaucracy in the chain of decision-making. It will then be councillors, council officials and inspectors, contractor's directors and managers, workers and finally users. It is another step towards American style contract cities where councillors and a few officials administer tendering procedures and supervise contracts.

councillors will have less control over services. The quality and level of services will be bound up in legal contracts, councillors will not be responsible for employment policies of an increasing number of workers, and they will be taking far fewer decisions on the purchase and use of equipment. The important values and satisfaction of public service will be eroded.

with new 'markets' worth about £2000m annually at stake corruption in local government will be commonplace. Illegal payments and practices, bribes and collusion between contractors goes hand in hand with the tendering process.

tions and links with workers in other councils and the private sector

- develop joint action and user committees in as many services as possible.
- combine new and imaginative forms of industrial action with more traditional methods and negotiating machinery.
- direct action by workers and users to defend and improve services
- an immediate counter offensive by local authorities and trade unions against contractors who already have public sector contracts.

Statutory tendering cannot be negotiated away, even temporarily, in the same way that many privatisation proposals have been to date. The clear lessons from anti-privatisation campaigns show that no one tactic will succeed, nor will traditional industrial action alone. Simply trying to outbid the contractors will result in a job loss — wage cutting downward spiral.

CLEANERS VETTED & SACKED

Thirty cleaners from the Ministry of Defence's main London building have been sacked in what the T&GWU has called 'post-Ponting hysteria'.

Last year the MoD privatised the cleaning service and awarded the contract due to start on 14th January 1985 to Cleandustrial Ltd. On 18th December 1984, the company wrote to the T&GWU who represented the MoD workers stating that 'we confirm that we are in a position to offer all current staff employment with Cleandustrial from 14th January 1985'.

One of the sacked women had worked at the MoD for 13 years and was senior shop steward. The T&GWU's efforts to find the true reasons behind recording on a 'screening form'. They were then all sent home and told to ring in on the following day. When they did, most were told that security clearance had not been obtained for them. Eventually only 15 cleaners were allowed back. Of those, five have been subsequently dismissed, including two shop stewards and the union dues collector.

Union pushed out

One of the sacked women had worked at the MoD for 13 years and was senior shop steward. The T&GWU's efforts to find the true reasons for behind the sackings have been unsuccessful. But an MoD spokesperson told the *Daily Mirror* recently that 'possibly this is a case of using security as an excuse [by the contractor] but we do not wish to be involved'. Either way, the result is that union organisation at the MoD has been severely undermined.

water hive-off



Philip Wolmuth

The Government is about to issue proposals for the privatisation of the 10 English and Welsh Water Authorities, whose combined turnover of £2.5 billion will provide rich pickings for private companies and their shareholders. Several options exist including: 'floating the existing water authorities BT-style or management buy-outs; large or small companies tendering for the complete system or parts of it; franchise or leasing arrangements.

Much of the UK's water industry is already privatised including building, maintenance, architects services, cleaning and catering. Water supply and sewage disposal are attractive propositions but not so the infrastructure which is old and decaying. This needs millions of pounds of investment to bring it up to standard and it is possible that taxpayers

could still end up footing the bill as private companies would not want to invest heavily.

A number of water authorities have made it clear that the support privatisation but a row is looming over the valuation of assets. Any hive-off will attempt to reduce the value to attract buyers. The eventual loss to the taxpayer could run into billions of pounds.

French multinational to move in?

A leading contender for taking over water services in the UK is the French multinational **Lyonnaise des Eaux**. Based in Paris, Lyonnaise controls a group of some 150 companies worldwide, involved in water treatment, waste collection and disposal, heating, electrical equipment and installation, civil engineering and maintenance and funeral services.

Lyonnaise is Europe's leading water treatment and waste collection operator, France's second largest water distributor and also first in France for mortuary services and fire control systems. (The company also originally distributed electricity and gas supplies in France but these were nationalised in 1946.) It owns 50% of General Waterworks Corporation, the USA's second largest water supply company. In Saudi Arabia, subsidiaries operate water supply and treatment stations and industrial and commercial waste collections.

The company is rapidly expanding its international markets: in 1980 only 12% of its sales were international. By 1983 they had reached 33% and currently the figure is over 40%. **Degremont**, its major water treatment subsidiary is a world leader in turnkey installations (1982 revenue was \$413 million). The UK arm is **Degremont Laing Ltd** 50% owned by Lyonnaise and 50% by construction group John Laing. Laings already carry out extensive works for the water authorities, including pipe laying, servicing and building and is totally familiar with the infrastructure. The company say that they would be 'very happy' to respond to the opportunity to provide water services in the UK.

POST OFFICE THREATS

In the oldest public corporation of all, the Post Office, the threat of privatisation is being used to press the unions to reach agreement with management on radical changes in work practices and staffing procedures.

The unions, already detecting an increasing Government influence in the Board's negotiating position on their claim for a 35 hour week, are apprehensive about the forthcoming review of counter services by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Proposals to privatise Post Office services were until recently the preserve of right-wing think tanks and a few Tory MPs. But the commercial success of the Post Office which, alone in Europe, runs profitably with no state subsidy makes it well qualified for selling off according to Government criteria. At a Conservative Party Local Government Conference in London on 9th March, a stall promoting post office counter services stood side by side with stalls of major companies currently winning public service con-

tracts. The PO's press office claims that this was simply to 'show our wares to people of influence'.

Emergency committee

To meet the privatisation threat, the Post Office Unions Committee have established an emergency committee to prepare for any campaign that may be needed. Their immediate tasks are to respond rapidly to any allusions in the media to possible privatisation and to produce information for union members. They are prepared to launch a campaign to win public support should the need arise. **More information: POU, Room 121, 2nd Floor, Empire House, St Martin's le Grand, London EC1A 4AE. Tel: 01-606 6486**

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CONTRACTORS Fines & Failures

Reckitts in trouble

Reckitt Cleaning Services are in trouble with their cleaning contract at the South Middlesex Hospital. Richard Inglis, a night nurse and COHSE Health and Safety Representative said: 'From day one we had problems — Reckitts could not supply enough staff and had to bus totally inexperienced people in to clean wards. I have been inundated with complaints over the past five months'.

South Middlesex Hospital has several long stay psychiatric wards where many patients are elderly and frail — some are incontinent. Constant cleaning is vital to prevent cross infection but nurses on the wards have reported areas uncleaned, with floors left with spilt food on them for hours and waste bins unemptied. COHSE Branch Secretary Ian Smith said: 'Nurses are being forced to do jobs previously done by domestics as they are unwilling to allow the wards to get filthy'. Reckitts have been using totally untrained staff to clean the infectious diseases unit. Despite union complaints the DHA has failed to take any action so far and the company's response has been that 'people's expectations are far above the standards'.

School for scandal

A union visit to Reckitt's so-called training school at High Wycombe has revealed that the school consists of one small room, approximately 12' x 10' with a sink, two cupboards and a vinyl floor.

● Reckitts have just pulled out of a contract to clean Worthing Hospital. The DHA awarded them the contract on the basis of their tender of £259,494 a saving of some £840,000 over a three year period. Reckitts planned to cut the existing in-house staff from 146 to 57 and cleaning time by 1,000 hours.

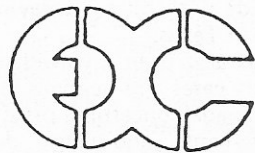
The choice of Reckitts caused controversy amongst DHA members and management. There was a great deal of concern that the company would be unable to maintain standards. Reckitts themselves finally decided that they would be unable to do the job adequately and withdrew. The DHA are now considering alternative contractors.

COHSE
stop
privatisation

Philip Wolmuth



Child LABOUR



Children have been employed by Exclusive on their cleaning contract at Wokingham Hospital, Berkshire. In February a hospital administrator, Ms Sue Cruddace, discovered that three girls under the age of 16 were working as cleaners and sent them home as she considered it 'inappropriate'.

Exclusive have found it difficult to recruit staff as they cut wages from £2.15 to £1.72 per hour when they took over. Despite their efforts to fill vacancies with child labour they are still understaffed. Ian Keys of the GMBATU said that only one of the original NHS staff has stayed on at the hospital. Cleaning standards at the hospital are causing the DHA considerable concern but liaison with the company is proving difficult as Exclusive's managers and supervisors keep changing.

Wandsworth

Twelve out of 13 tenants associations in Roehampton, Wandsworth voted against any extension of the private caretaking scheme operated by Initial Services. Tenants say it's a shambles. Despite this the council has decided to privatise the borough's entire caretaking service. Initial's contract will be enlarged to take in Putney and the bulk of the borough will be handed over to Exclusive Cleaning (part of Brengreen Holdings). 160 caretakers' jobs are at stake. This will bring the number of jobs lost to privatisation alone in Wandsworth to nearly 1000 since 1981.

Tenants' action

Tenants have organised mass petitioning against staff cutting by Initial. The firm said it would employ 23 workers but only employs 18 and takes on temporary workers when they are needed. Tenants' groups complain bitterly about the standard of work and that it takes major complaints to get Initial to take action and only then does it call in temporary workers. One caretaker was sacked because he couldn't maintain (clean stairs, change light bulbs etc) 800 dwellings in 31 tower blocks. Initial's tender documents claimed that they would get new equipment, for example industrial vacuum cleaners, but these have not appeared.

The council appointed a consulting firm, Armitage Norton, who had previously helped prepare the privatisation plans, to produce a report to try to prove that the service under Initial had improved. The report is based on crude estimates and poses as being 'scientific' and is clearly a weapon to try to undermine the tenants' action.

NUPE have now organised most of the Initial workforce and are seeking recognition from the firm.

Danger Trucks

Waste Management who took over Tory-controlled Wirral Council's refuse collection contract in 1983 (see PSA 8 & 10) have been criticised in an internal council report. The report alleges Waste Management uses inadequate and dangerous vehicles which frequently break down causing disruption to the service. Council engineers inspected 19 of the company's 37 vehicles and concluded that 84% would probably fail a Department of Transport test and 21% had dangerous faults. 10% would not start. Waste Management claim that the report was compiled by unqualified officers but the opposition Labour Group are calling for a full inquiry.



Sold to the USA

An American transnational company now operates refuse collection in Wandsworth, Chelsea and Basingstoke. Grandmet has sold its Wastecare subsidiary to Browning Ferris Industries Inc (BFI) of Houston, Texas, for an undisclosed sum.

BFI claims to be the largest international waste collection and disposal firm with contracts in South America and the Middle East. BFI has ambitious plans for Britain. "We had a corporate desire to enter the market in the UK and Wastecare was a starting point" Roger Hewitt, chairperson and chief executive of BFI in Britain, told PSA. He added "we want to be a significant force in the UK industry".

BFI is currently seeking further refuse contracts. It also intends bidding for street cleansing contracts and is aiming to have "industrial, commercial and residential waste collection and disposal, including landfill sites, in all its facets" Hewitt stated. BFI will achieve this through "a balanced plan of acquisition and organic growth". Hewitt claimed that BFI had an "open style of management". Workers would be "free to join a union" which the company would recognise for negotiating purposes.

The residents nor the councillors where Wastecare has contracts had no say whatsoever. One minute refuse is carried out by Grandmet, the next its controlled by an American transnational with a long history of illegal practices, fines, and ruthless takeovers of smaller firms.

BFI's turnover was \$1000.8m in 1984 with profits of \$89.2m. It has over 170 depots and 4500 trucks in America and Canada with over 300 council contracts. The firm operates 75 landfill sites and 19 solid waste transfer stations. Its CECOS International subsidiary handles hazardous wastes and BFI also operates refuse fired plants.

BFI's overseas operations include refuse collection and street cleansing in Caracas and Maracaibo in Venezuela; waste collection in four cities in Spain; a five year \$233m refuse contract in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; and 4 contracts in Kuwait. BFI uses migrant labour on

its Middle Eastern contracts employing 3,700 Indians and Sri Lankans.

A sample of fines

● The US Justice Dept. is currently seeking over \$800,000 from BFI and 3 other firms for price fixing and overcharging the government.

● In 1983 BFI and another waste firm were fined \$350,000 and their local manager was jailed for price fixing in Atlanta, Georgia.

● BFI admitted to the US Securities and Exchange Commission making \$100,000 in illegal payments to public officials in the 1970's.

● In 1979 BFI paid a \$200,000 civil penalty in an out-of-court settlement after the firm had mixed nitrobenzenes and cyanide with oil for spraying onto dirt roads in Texas.

● BFI has also been involved in numerous court cases and hearings in America and Canada concerning price fixing, illegal payments, and illegal dumping of chemical wastes. Murders, truck bombings, links with organised crime and various other illegal activities were alleged as BFI, Waste Management Inc and SCA Services fought to take over smaller firms in their battle to monopolise the waste market in North America.

Contractors &

ARA

Despite damning evidence on illegal activities, fines and failures of ARA Services Inc, the large American catering & nursing home operator, Wandsworth Council proceeded to give their British subsidiary a £523,000 catering contract covering 11 homes for the elderly. (See PSA No 13 p6) After local trade unionists submitted details of ARA's activities Wandsworth Council carried out its own investigation. The council asked Morgan Grenfell, merchant bankers and managers of the council's pension fund, and multinational accountants Deloitte Haskins and Sells to report on ARA. Both firms' reports consisted of one side of paper. Morgan Grenfell claimed that 'according to the brokers with whom we have spoken, the company is known for its ability to run its labour force at low cost'. Deloitte Haskins and Sells commented on lawsuits against ARA, 'none of these are significant and are regarded as normal for a company operating in a service industry'. Council officials also interviewed the firm's British managers and a vice-president travelled from America to be interviewed. The concluding report was, not surprisingly, evasive and brushed aside all the evidence.

Meanwhile in Leeds, Environmental Health Officers inspected the Oakwood House Nursing Home on 14 December '84. The home is owned by Goldborough Ltd and ARA Food Services are the contract caterers. The health inspectors found unsatisfactory conditions which were later remedied by ARA and the owners. However, the inspectors had to lay on a lecture on Food Hygiene for ARA's catering staff. Another seminar was laid on for ARA's regional and area managers. So much for ARA's 'expertise and professional approach' claimed by Wandsworth Council.

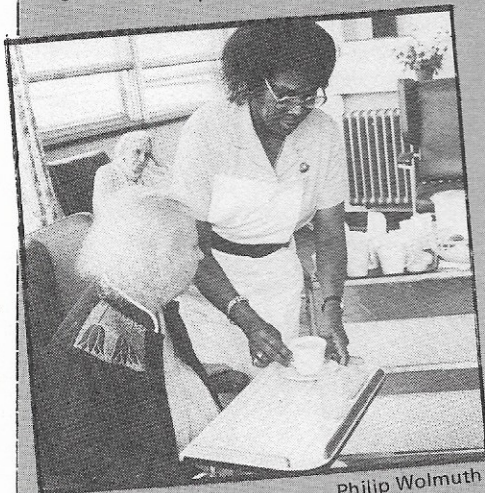
BET buys out INITIAL

British Electric Traction's (BET) bid to purchase the 58% of Initial that they do not own has been cleared by the Monopolies Commission and the company has offered £173 million. The Monopolies Commission found that BET, which already owns Advance, would not 'endanger' the public interest by also owning Initial. There is some concern, however, over the way that the Monopolies Commission handled the affair. It took them seven months to reach their decision, yet only eighteen months previously they completed an in-depth report on the whole of the textile maintenance industry (of which Advance and Initial are part). Apparently much of that report's findings have been repeated almost word for word in the decision document relating to BET and the Initial takeover. Why did the decision therefore take seven months and how much did the process cost the taxpayer?

& Consultants

GOING HOME QUICKER BUT SICKER

Grand Metropolitan recently purchased Quality Care, a major US nursing home services operator for \$124 million. Quality Care has 168 regional offices in 43 states and employs 1000 permanent and 9000 'freelance' (casual) staff. The US home health care market is currently worth some \$9.6 billion a year and is growing at a rate of between 20% and 30% a year. Due to cuts in the US government's Medicare system people leave hospital 'quicker but sicker' and have to rely on home care services. The market is also expanding as 'people are living longer and elderly people are more susceptible to illness'. Grand Met's New York company acquisitions team is interested in buying other companies in the field.



Philip Wolmuth

BRENGREEN ON THE SLATE

Brengreen Holdings Ltd (Exclusive's parent company) has bought the **Four Seasons Roofing Company** for £5.5 million. Four Seasons has offices in North and South London, Birmingham, Bristol and South Wales and is planning to open in Manchester very soon. Brengreen's plan is to develop as a broad-based building services contractor and hopes to win local authority and NHS contracts.

HOLIDAY HIVE-OFF

Have a close look at where your money goes this summer: there are plans to privatise deckchairs on Weston-Super-Mare's seafront, the cliff lifts at Cliftonville and Ramsgate and the beaches at Torbay and Paignton. Thanet Council are also investigating a plan to hive off Margate's tourist office to a new company set up by the Margate Hotel and Guest House Association. Could a Pritchards Holiday Camp be far off?

● The sale of Whitstable Harbour has been put off for two years while the City Council tries to reduce losses by making cuts.

HAWLEY Profit\$ Doub£ed

The Hawley Group (see PSA 11) made pre-tax profits of £31.5 million in 1984, a 121% increase on 1983. The rapidly expanding cleaning and maintenance operations contributed £6.7m profit.

Overall, over half the Group's profits came from North America. In the USA, **Oxford Services** recently won a new 3 year hospital maintenance contract worth \$18m. In January, Hawley snapped up two more US companies: the **Taylor-Wise Group** for \$14m, which operates landscaping, commercial refuse collection and cleaning contracts in the South Eastern states and **Maintenance Company** for \$12.5m, which services and installs lifts and escalators; installs maintains and repairs air conditioning and is also in marine electrical contracting. Both acquisitions are part of the Hawley strategy to offer a total package of services to local authorities, hospitals and commercial companies.

Doubts about Mainco

The purchase of Mainco could add to the City's criticisms of Hawley's operations. PSA has obtained a draft of an internal Hawley pre-acquisition report on Mainco which concludes: '... do not see it as being an easy company on which to base further growth especially with the age of the management and type of market'. On announcing the purchase, however, Hawley stated that the company's management would be retained. Further, the report mentions Hawley possibly 'utilising our (hospital) connections in Atlanta and other major cities, however, it must be remembered that any of the Southern cities which are new will have elevators... installed by Otis and Westinghouse... and will have maintenance agreements and will not want an independent elevator company to carry out the work'. Yet clearly Hawley intend to target hospital contracts in the South-Eastern states as on announcing the contract they stated that Mainco's operations will be developed there.

On Mainco's accounting practices (remember that Hawley's own have come under heavy City criticism) the pre-acquisition report quotes one major advantage: '... they can delay payment on their income tax for a considerable period. Note: in the balance sheet they have something like \$2.5m owing...'

Unlike most other Hawley acquisitions, Mainco is unionised and the report refers to a number of related problems from hiring labour to being unable to tender for contracts in certain areas, particularly New York.

New UK deal?

Back in the UK, Ashcroft through his **Midepsa** company, is interested in buying up **Hestair**, which builds



coaches, fire engines and dust carts. But in order to keep his interest secret initially he used his chauffeur and secretary's names to buy up large stakes in the company. The acquisition of Hestair would link other Hawley companies like **Colman Milne**, which turns ordinary cars into limousines, and **Evan Evans** coaches — Hestair's **Duple** company builds coaches. The possibility of providing fire engines and dustcarts would also make 'total package' sense, particularly for Hawley's **Taskmasters** subsidiary (see PSA 11).

Mediclean Contracts

Meanwhile, Hawley's **Mediclean Ltd** has now picked up 10 hospital cleaning contracts but at the end of their second month of their contract at St Helier Hospital, Carshalton, (see PSA 13) things are not working out well and discontent amongst the workers is rising rapidly. The managers have notified staff that they must produce a sick note for each day's illness. This could mean cleaners paying as much as £5 to get a private note from their doctor. The former NHS staff employed by Mediclean know that this isn't normal practice and are questioning the company's policy.

Mediclean have also recently announced that they will not pay staff for bank holidays unless they actually work on those days. Normal NHS practice is to pay staff if they have been rostered to work. This could also lead to major confrontation with the company after Easter.

Report on Standards

Cleaning standards at the hospital have dramatically reduced since Mediclean took over. The company has had to call in another Hawley company, **Provincial Cleaning Services Ltd** (see PSA 11) to help out at weekends. According to a former Mediclean supervisor, Mr David Granger, a nine-year-old boy was seen to be helping out his mother, a Provincial employee. Health Authority management are reported to be only 'reasonably satisfied' with the company and are requesting that a full report into their performance be prepared.

Union drive

A successful union recruitment campaign is taking place at the hospital. Members of the Sutton TUC Health Sub-Committee and the local NUPE official have organised a sustained leafletting campaign every Monday morning since the contract began.

Shipyards

The asset stripping of British Shipbuilders (BS) is speeding up. Within the next few weeks Michael Heseltine, Defence Secretary, will announce the privatisation of the warship yards.

GEC is reported to have beaten Trafalgar House for the profitable (£11.5m profits in 1984) Yarrow yard in Glasgow. The £30m price makes a tiny dent in GEC's £1600m cash mountain.

The naval dockyards at Devonport, Plymouth and Rosyth, Fife are expected to be leased to private contractors. The 20,000 workforce will be sacked and then re-employed by contractors but with about 3000 redundancies. The yards carry out £400m maintenance work annually on Royal Navy ships including the Polaris submarines.

BS also plans to sell the Vickers yard in Barrow, Vosper Thornycroft in Southampton, Cammell Laird on Merseyside, and Swan Hunter on Tyneside. The BS owned Barclay Curle plant in Glasgow was sold in March for an undisclosed sum to Langham Industries and the former head of BS's general engineering companies.

Housebuilder buys yard

British Shipbuilders have just sold the Falmouth Shiprepair yard in Cornwall for a mere £1.75m to a partnership formed by housebuilders Bellway and A & P Appledore which manages yards in Greece, Gibraltar, Dubai, and Malaysia. Bellway also has a 19 per cent stake in a proposal to build a £70m container terminal in the area.

The Falmouth yard, employing 430 workers, has been very profitable. It made £855,000 pre-tax profits in the year ending March 1984 on sales of £7.4m. The knockdown sale price is well below British Shipbuilders current valuation of £2.5m and the estimated £100m replacement costs.

BAe



SALE

The Government's remaining 48 per cent stake in British Aerospace (BAe) will be sold in May. The sale of 96.85m shares is expected to raise about £350m. A share sales promotion similar but smaller to that mounted for the sale of British Telecom will be launched within weeks.

Merchant bankers Kleinwort Benson are BAe's financial advisers. They also handled the BT sale as well as previous asset sales. Not surprisingly their net profits jumped 40 per cent to £30.28m last year. An undisclosed sum was transferred to their hidden reserves.



SHIPREPAIR CO-OP CRASHES

The workers co-op at the Redheads Shiprepair yard in South Shields has collapsed. Eighty workers pooled their £110,000 redundancy money after BS closed the yard in 1982. After pressure from the Department of Trade and Industry BS leased the yard to the co-op for a small charge. Thatcher and Norman Lamont, Industry Minister, praised the workers and hailed the project as a model of how privatisation could work.

Many workers at the yard were employed on a casual basis queueing up for work daily. They also signed a no strike, no overtime ban, no demarcation disputes, and maximum flexibility agreement. Pay rates were much lower than neighbouring yards.

By February this year the co-op had debts of £250,000. The government refused a request for £400,000 aid. Now the yard has been taken over by Tyne Dock Engineering owned by Zenta Engineering Holdings of Glasgow. Only about 30 workers will be re-employed. All the workers have lost their money.

Barratts Again

Barratts Urban Renewal have approached Labour-controlled North Tyneside council with a plan to redevelop the Killingworth Towers estate, renovating council flats for sale. The 750-home estate was completed only ten years ago, but has design faults which will cost an estimated £2 million to remedy. The Government has allowed the council to borrow only £6.3 million for its

Private Trust FAILS

The most famous privatisation housing scheme is in deep financial trouble. (see PSA 2,4 and 6). The Stockbridge Village Trust was set up in 1983 to take over the 3,000 home Cantril Farm estate near Liverpool and has now run up an overdraft of £1.7 million. Backed by Heseltine from the start the government has consistently advertised Cantril Farm as a model for others to follow.

Despite promises of £20 million government finance over a 5 year period (£11 million housing association loans and nearly £10 million in urban development grants), the Trust is unable to pay its way and its current account is also in deficit.

Higher interest charges and difficulty in selling renovated houses are major problems. The Trust is considering a 35% rent increase for existing tenants. Despite this embarrassing position the Trust is considering selling the first of 3 tower blocks for £1 to the main developer Barratts rather than £125,000 originally planned.

Barratts dive

Meanwhile Barratt Developments profits for the last half of 1984 plunged £15m down to £4m — a fall of 78 per cent. The firm blamed this collapse in part on widespread criticism of its timber framed construction methods and its sales techniques. Barratt's response is to go 'up-market'. It has closed 6 sales offices, sacked staff, and is to concentrate on 'executive homes' and the second-time buyer.

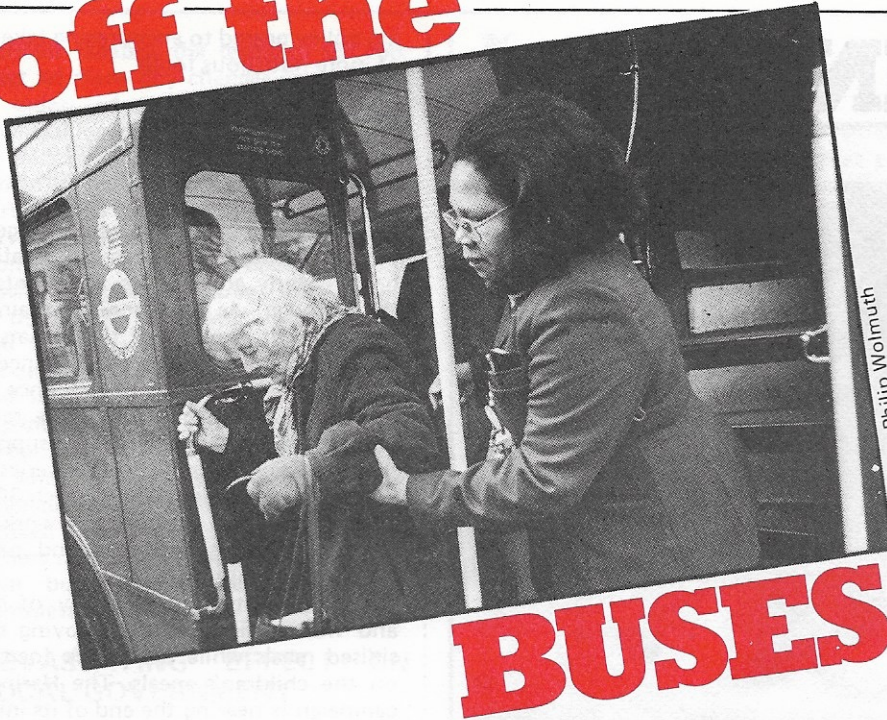
Philip Wolmuth



entire housing improvement programme in the coming year, just one third of the amount it planned to spend. Now actively pursuing the option of privatisation, the council has sought alternative proposals from other major building firms.

The council's deliberations have taken place behind closed doors, without consulting the tenants on the estate. The Tenants' Association are demanding information from the council on their plans and are organising a series of public meetings on the estate to discuss tenants' views and organise a response to the council's proposals.

off the



BUSES

Chaos on the roads, danger on the buses, wage cuts and redundancies for bus workers, cuts in services — these are just a few of the consequences of the 1985 Transport Bill now going through Parliament (see also PSA No. 9).

Opposition to the Bill is mounting rapidly not only from the labour movement but also from Tory MPs, amenity and rural organisations which are traditional Tory supporters. Action by recently formed Bus Campaigns is exposing the drastic consequences of Transport Minister Nicholas Ridley's obsession with competition at all costs. Several hundred people attended the launch of the Roads to Ruin video in Sheffield on 13 March. Pensioners' groups are leafleting and drawing up petitions. A national demonstration will be held in London on 2 April.

The government's timetable is already three months behind schedule — they want the legislation approved by summer so that it can be fully implemented by October 1986.

What the Tories will do

- controls on bus services will be abolished allowing anyone with a bus to compete for passengers on profitable routes (except in London).
- Passenger Transport Executives and district council bus services will be turned into companies and broken up.
- the National Bus Company will be privatised and broken up into separate companies.
- all subsidised services will have to go out to tender.
- restrictions on minibus operations will be removed.
- cab sharing will be allowed and taxis permitted to compete with bus services.
- councils will be duty bound not to inhibit competition.
- the number of Traffic Commissioners will be greatly reduced.
- subsidies are to be slashed.
- the government will have extensive powers to effect further changes in local services.

- the abolition of the Metropolitan Counties will result in public transport being under the control of unelected Transport Joint Boards from April 1986.



shows both the chaotic reality of the pilot scheme in Hereford and the massive support and appreciation of South Yorkshire's long-established progressive transport policies and cheap fares.

The video is available on loan (free up to 2 days plus postage) or can be purchased by trade unions and community groups for £15 (£30 to other organisations).

* Leaflets and campaign material also available.

Contact:
Sheffield Bus Campaign,
c/o TGWU Office,
2nd Floor, 11a Arundel Gate,
Sheffield S1
Tel: 0742-78688 ext. 2238
or 2446

Roads to Ruin was made for the Sheffield Bus Campaign by Steel Bank Films with finance from Sheffield City Council.

REDUNDANT? BUY A BUS

Dockers in Hull were recently told by Transport Minister David Mitchell to invest their redundancy money in a bus and take over routes which were 'uneconomic' or unattractive to the bigger operators.

Would-be entrepreneurs of the Thatcher mould can pick up a clapped-out old bus from *Exchange and Mart*!

ACTION

Derby City Branch NALGO and West Yorkshire PTE NALGO Branch have decided not to co-operate with the implementation of deregulation and privatisation. Sheffield bus workers TWGU 9/10 Branch has passed a resolution calling on all unions in the transport industry to hold a series of one-day strikes co-ordinated as part of a national campaign.

Further details of the legislation and campaigns can be obtained from TGWU Passenger Services Group, Transport House, Smith Square, London SW1. Public Transport Information Unit, 308 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

Private Trial

The trial de-regulation of bus services in Hereford has been a disaster (see PSA No. 9). Virtually all the companies which took part have dropped out or been forced off the road because of dangerous buses. Midland Red now has competition on just two routes in Hereford. A recent study by the University of Bristol revealed that private coach operators had lost about £670,000 annually because of the experiment.

Hereford City Council points to the instability of services provided, and above all complains of the increase in congestion and damage, including parking problems and oil spillage which has fouled the city streets. They conclude that 'the experiment had put the environmental condition of the city back by twenty years'.

LRT

The government announced in March that London Regional Transport had been divided into trading companies. Two subsidiaries, London Buses and London Underground, start trading on 1st April. A third company, LRT Bs Engineering, will be set up to compete with private contractors on bus maintenance. Five bus garages at Battersea, Poplar, Edmonton, Walworth and Southall are to close. Route mileage is being cut by 2.8 per cent this year, which together with the conversion to driver only buses and further tendering of routes, could lead to more closures, cuts and big job losses.

IMPROVING

Philip Wolmuth



SCHOOL MEALS

In the London Borough of Haringey a School Meals Action Campaign has been launched involving NUPE stewards in the school meals service and the Haringey Women's Employment Project, with support from the London Food Commission.

The campaign was started in response to threats to the service from rate-capping, and has now also taken on the threat of privatisation. It is not, however, a purely defensive campaign. 'The school meals service has a very low profile', says campaign worker Marie Williams, herself a worker and shop steward in the service, 'we plan to change that by running a positive campaign to show that the service is of value to children's health and education'.

Haringey's school meals service is a success story. With 80% of the Borough's schoolchildren using the service, it has the highest take-up in London. The food is well subsidised with meals costing only 45p, and the service provides employment to 1,200 women. The Campaign emphasises in its leaflets the crucial role of the service in providing jobs in an area of high unemployment, and the way in which cuts in the service or overpriced meals will lead to more unpaid labour for women at home having to cook lunches for children.

Raising Morale

The Campaign has set out to involve school meals workers in promoting and improving the service. 'Morale was very low at the start', says Marie, 'school meals workers are undervalued and they undervalue their own skills.' Since the campaign started things have changed. An exhibition on the service on 'Education Day' at the Central Library attracted a good deal of interest and publicity and gave workers a much needed boost. The exhibition, which

was only included in the council's anti-ratecapping displays after a fight, has since been in great demand. School meals workers are at last becoming visible.

Training Plan

A strategy is being developed for improving and extending the jobs of school meals workers. A training plan is being drawn up to use in a fight for more opportunities for workers with a chance to gain qualifications which are marketable outside the education service. The plan involves a resistance to cost-cutting innovations being introduced elsewhere, such as cook-chill and cook-freeze technology, because these de-skill the workforce. There are also proposals to extend the role of meals staff in schools by involving them in food education and training lunchtime supervisors in co-operative games, with an emphasis on anti-sexism and anti-racism.

Healthier food

The Campaign has also taken up the issue of nutritional value of school meals. While emphasising the crucial importance of school dinners to children with parents unemployed or on a low income, it has succeeded in giving the council the push it needed to introduce new wholefood menus in the summer term, where special provision will be made for the children from Haringey's very large ethnic minorities. The process is already underway of informing and advising the meals staff in schools on the new foods, with a pric-

ing policy geared to encouraging take-up of more nutritious foods.

Winning Public Support

The organisers aim to involve the widest possible number of people in the campaign and are supported by the NUT, NUPE, PTAs and a whole range of women's and health groups. Leaflets have recently gone out to all parents in the Borough, via the schools, explaining the political context of the threats to the service, detailing the importance of school meals and the experience of privatisation, and giving a whole range of suggestions for activities to support the campaign. The first of a series of workshops is to be held on March 30th, to bring together school meals workers, teachers, parents, children and other interested groups.

Marie points out the irony of MPs and workers in industry enjoying subsidised meals while the attack focusses on the children's meals. The Haringey campaign is nearing the end of its initial three month phase, with hopes of continued support to take the campaign further. It is an important example of what can be done before threats actually materialise, when so many campaigns start too late and are fought on a purely defensive basis. **More information from: Marie Williams, NUPE office, 2A Brabant Rd, London N22. Tel: 01-881 3000 x 3320.**

Wirral STRIKE BY 2400 BEATS MASSIVE CUTS

A two week strike by 2,400 council workers has stopped Wirral Council slashing £3.2 million from its education and social services budgets. School meals staff, cleaners, caretakers and gardeners faced massive job losses, cut hours, lost benefits, less wages and more work. A joint union co-ordinating committee was set up, mass meetings held and picket lines set up all over the area. Support for the strike came from other unions whose members refused to cross picket lines: milk, oil and postal deliveries were stopped. The National Union of Teachers and the NAS also gave financial support.

The council tried to play off school meals workers against social services workers but the joint action thwarted the council's tactics. Not only was the strike a total success — the council were forced to withdraw the entire cuts package — but NUPE recruited 800 new members. Now a Joint Shop Stewards Committee has been formed to take on threats including the government's Green Paper on tendering. **Contact: Neil Beacall, NUPE, 051-645 6272.**

NHS FRAUD

CONSULTANTS' RIP OFF

Widespread abuse and apparent fraud by NHS consultants with private practices have been exposed in a Labour Party analysis of the audit reports of 17 DHAs. Reported abuses include:

- Consultants receiving private patients' fees and failing to repay the NHS for use of time, equipment and manpower.
 - Failure to identify and charge private patients in NHS hospitals.
 - Use of NHS ambulances to transfer private patients to convalescent homes causing an inadequate service for NHS patients.
 - Use of NHS facilities to carry out work free of charge for private hospitals.
- Health Minister Kenneth Clarke denounced Labour's Michael Meacher for making 'wild allegations', but has ordered DHAs to halt the abuses.

Neil Martinson



'Celebrating' the first anniversary of the strike by Crothalls workers at Barking Hospital. Redbridge DHA make their decision on the future of the contract on 2nd April. There will be a mass lobby and picket. Venue details from: Strikeline, 01-595 4252 or 01-592 5038.

IN-HOUSE WINS

An in-house tender by domestic staff at Worcester Royal Infirmary has beaten off bids by private contractors. Their success means that full wages, bonus, hours and conditions are to be kept but there will be a loss of 6 temporary-contract domestics.

HOSPITAL FOOD CUTS

Hospitals have been ordered by junior health minister Patten to cut their food bill by 5%, and to stop providing subsidised meals to NHS staff on NHS premises. Can we now expect news that he and his colleagues in the House of Commons will also lose the privilege of subsidised meals?

RHA TO AXE JOBS AND BEDS

The North West Thames Health Authority has published its Regional Strategy involving plans to cut 5000 jobs and 2000 hospital beds. The RHA Chairman claims that 'services will be maintained'.

Public Inquiry into NHS

Wide support has been given to an independent public inquiry into health services in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Sponsors so far include: MPs Peter Shore and Ian Mikardo, the Medical Practitioners Union, ASTMS, Federation of Bangladeshi Youth Organisations, Tower Hamlets Trades Council, the Community Health Council and local health campaigns. The inquiry will thoroughly investigate health needs in the area and is inviting all those concerned with the NHS to give evidence. A panel of inquiry will be appointed soon and the inquiry will take place this Summer. The inquiry is an imaginative step in the campaign to defend and improve the NHS in the area. Details from: Tower Hamlets Health Inquiry, Room 104, Town Hall, Patriot Square, London E2 9LN.

More News

PRIVATE PLANNERS

Two senior officers who left their jobs with East Sussex County Council to set up their own company, *Transport Design and Development Ltd*, have now won a 3year contract, thought to be worth £100,000 a year, from their former employers. They are to take over the council's statutory transport coordination of public transport services, assessing the need for services and monitoring them, the preparation of tenders for subsidised services, advice to community transport groups and developing special rural services, shuttle buses in Brighton and a modern ticketing system.

The council will retain a small in-house team to advise on policy issues. It is claimed that the privatisation of most of the transport planning function will save the council £75,000 in the first year of the contract the more thereafter. With Ridley's plans for deregulation of buses on their way to the statute book, there will be lucrative times ahead for transport consultants. The two involved in this contract, with their staff of 12, expect to win similar contracts from other local authorities over the next year or two.

RENT-A-DOCTOR PLAN

Government ministers are currently discussing a new plan which presents the most serious threat yet to the NHS. It involves issuing patients with vouchers to pay GPs for a year's basic health care, with extra benefits for those who can pay. GPs would buy hospital care for their patients from public or private hospitals, according to which supposedly offered the best deal. GPs profits would depend on how little treatment and hospital care they 'bought' for their patients. The BMA has denounced the plan as immoral.

FEWER MEDICINES

The Government has now pushed its limited drugs list plan through the House of Commons, which reinforces the movement towards two-tier health care. A large number of drugs will no longer be available on prescription to NHS patients, but will still be available to those who can pay for them.

HIGHER CHARGES

Prescription charges will rise to £2 per item on 1st April, amounting to a 1000% increase since 1979. On the same day dental charges face a 25% increase on a new scale with a maximum treatment charge of £115, and the privatisation of optical services comes into effect.

PUBLIC SERVICE ACTION

Information

CASHING IN ON CARE. A NUPE/SCAT publication, £3.50 to non-members from NUPE, 20 Grand Depot Road, London SE18 or SCAT Publications, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1. Produced by the London and East Midland Divisions of NUPE with Services to Community Action and Trade Unions (SCAT), this detailed report chronicles the scale and the grim effects of the increasing privatisation of health and social services. It covers the impact of spending cuts, care in the community on the cheap, the 'tender loving greed' of private residential homes, the increasing use of volunteers, higher charges for services, and shows that the crisis in caring is deepening. It has lots of evidence and information to use in campaigns. It points out that there is an alternative to the Tories' policies and has many ideas for action by the broad labour movement.

FINES, FAILURES AND ILLEGAL PRACTICES IN NORTH AMERICA: Private Health Care Dossier, NUPE/SCAT. £2.50 from SCAT Publications, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1. The dossier shows how transnational companies now dominate private hospitals, nursing and residential homes in America and Canada and provides very damning evidence about the quality and cost of care. It documents in detail the fines and failures of the Hospital Corporation of America, ARA Services, Beverley Enterprises, Service-Master, Humana, American Medical International and companies in Canada. Many already operate in Britain. It shows the activities of British based firms like Grand Metropolitan and Pritchard Services in North America.

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Philip Wolmuth



Support the Miners — the NUM still needs funds. Keep digging deep!

POST OFFICE CLOSURES & HOW TO FIGHT THEM. Four pages of notes based on the experience in Coventry. While there is no one particular way to organise a campaign these notes will certainly help get a campaign started. Price 5p a copy or free inside Coventry Workshop Bulletin, March 1985 issue, price 25p. From: **Coventry Workshop**, 38 Binley Road, Coventry, CV3 1JA.

LONDON HEALTH EMERGENCY ANNUAL REPORT 1984/4. Details of LHE's extensive work ranging from publishing a regular newspaper to helping to organise direct action and practical assistance for campaigns. Useful document for NHS campaigns elsewhere. From: **LHE**, 335 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Tel: 01-833 3020.

SIREN! BULLETIN OF TOWER HAMLETS HEALTH CAMPAIGN. A well produced monthly broadsheet aimed at defending and improving the NHS in Tower Hamlets. Copies available from: **THHC**, 21 Old Ford Road, London E2. Tel: 01-980 0445.

WORKERS WIN CLAIM

A number of Asian workers unfairly dismissed by **Reliance Airport Cleaners Ltd** (see PSA 12) have won damages from the company. After the first day of an Industrial Tribunal hearing, the company were advised to settle 'out of court' rather than await the Tribunal's decision which would have inevitably found against Reliance. After negotiations, the workers settled for £250 each and celebrated by holding an impromptu picnic on the Industrial Tribunal's premises. A spokesperson for the workers told PSA that they were 'very bitter' at the way they had been treated by the company and that 'the Industrial Tribunal was the only way they could get back at them at the time'. Meanwhile the campaign by the workers against contractors at Heathrow Airport continues with a union recruitment drive. **Contact: Southall Employment Unit, Tel: 01 571 4920.**

PRIVATISATION: THE GREAT SELL-OUT. 85p from LRD, 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1. This is the third of LRD's pamphlets on privatisation. It has sections on selling off state assets, contracting out the NHS, privatising buses, council services and government departments. Each section has lots of useful information and examples on the effects, costs, contractors, wages and conditions, fines and failures, and where contractors have been sacked.

Information needed

PUBLIC SERVICE ACTION needs:

- campaign news reports from trade unions, shop stewards committees, trades councils, tenants' groups and other organisations;
- information about contractors' failures, lost contracts etc;
- copies of authorities' reports discussing and comparing tenders and any trade union submissions;
- details of contractors' wages, conditions and benefits;
- copies of any campaign leaflets and publicity material.

Please write or phone SCAT Publications.

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