

# SOCIALIST WORKER EXTRA

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PAPEK OF THE SOCIALIST WORKERS MOVEMENT

## HEALTH CUTS KILL!

IN THE last few days of the Coalition government, Fianna Fail TDs argued strongly against the then-proposed health cuts. "There is a better way" their election manifesto shouted.

*Health cuts kill the sick and the elderly their posters declared. Now in government they are proceeding with cuts even greater than those originally proposed.*

And Fianna Fail health cuts kill the sick and the elderly every bit as much as would the Coalition's cuts.

Not that we should expect Fine Gael or the Progressive Democrats to do much about them. They have spoken often and loudly against individual specific details of the cuts while making it that they too want the health services cut.

They have been careful not to pass a motion of no confidence in the Government or the Minister for Health, ensuring that the government will not be defeated in the Dail on the issue.

The £10 charge for out patients' services and the £10 per day for in-patients are only the first step of what is now clearly a generalised attack on the quality of the health services and health service workers. In recent years, anyone seeking admission to hospital for a non-emergency operation, such as hip-replacement — an operation which can bring urgently-needed relief from the agony that elderly people with worn out hips suffer — had to wait months and sometimes years before getting a bed.

That wait will now be even longer unless they can afford to go private.

\* Hip-replacements is one of the main services provided by Cappagh Hospital. It has now said that it will have to reduce these operations by a half because of the cuts.

It is expected that this year twenty hospitals and other institutions will be closed;  
\* 2100 beds will be lost — 800 acute, 1000 geriatric and 300 psychiatric;  
\* 3,700 jobs will be lost, including doctors, nurses, lab technicians, cleaners, kitchen staff, etc.

*The quality of care will be drastically cut. As one hospital surgeon put it: "If you ask me if could I give a safe service the answer must be that I do not know."*

Among other services to be cut is the Child Sexual Abuse Clinic in the Rotunda. And this at a time when the number of reported cases of child abuse has increased dramatically.

The reaction of hospital managements has been to attack the already bad working conditions of their staff. Staff in the Coombe have been asked to take a ten per cent pay cut from June. Others have been asked to work a day, a month, without pay. Trainee nurses who provide an essential part of the service in many hospitals are to have their pay slashed to £50.

Staff are also expected to work very long hours. Doctors at Galway Regional Hospital revealed that because of the cut-backs, eight doctors have lost their jobs. The remaining doctors are expected to work 120 hours a week and every second weekend.

*They warned that: "It is inevitable that, if doctors work these hours errors of judgement may occur and standards of patient care will seriously deteriorate."*



WHERE WILL  
I GO  
IF I GET SICK

A young girl seeking an answer

As an alternative to hospital care the idea of community care is being bandied about. Or as Fianna Fail TD Michael Smith put it: "people should consider looking after their geriatric parents at home."

Deputy Smith who has scarcely ever done a hand's turn in his life would be in no position to know what it's like looking after a doubly-incontinent geriatric patient who require almost continuous care and attention from feed to washing and just turning in their beds.

Once again women are being asked to act as free health workers in the home.

*In one recent example of "community care" a psychiatric patient was put on a plane for England with just £10 in his pocket.*

Only by fighting the health cuts can we ensure that decent health care is provided for all and that such scandals do not occur in the future.

\* Fianna Fail Ministers defending the health cuts have all said that no one will die because of them.

However, Mr Joe Arkins recently told members of the Mid-Western Health Board that one psychiatric patient became so upset over ward closures that she drowned herself.

As he put it himself: "This is one death — and we have not yet come to a decision on cutbacks!"



Staff of Hospital of the Assumption, Thurles at the Nenagh protest.

## Fight the health cuts



Chairman of the Mid-Western Health Board, Mayor Jack Bourke, meets protesting nurses at the gates of St. Camillus Hospital.

THERE HAS been an outbreak of sheer anger against Fianna Fail's health cuts. All across the country, thousands of nurses and hospital staff have stopped work to demonstrate. They have won the support of community groups and other trade unionists. Already the first small cracks in Fianna Fail have begun to appear. Politicians who are running scared for their seats are screaming "Don't close our hospitals — the cuts in the rest of the country are plenty".

But still "Dr Death" O'Hanlon sits it out. He knows that he has the full backing of Fine Gael and the Progressive Democrats. For once all the right-wing parties of the country are openly united. His aim is to stall until the anger dies out.

This is why he pretends to show concern. He listens to deputations. He sets up special commissions — but the programme of cuts will go through, if we don't stop him.

**If we are to win, we need to be clear about two points.**

Firstly, there are no local solutions. In the past you could lobby and push to stop a ward in a local hospital from being closed down. But this time the fight has to be on a national basis. A number of Fianna Fail politicians are trying to play a bouble game on the issue. They are for the cuts in the Dail, but when it comes down to their local hospital they say they want an exception. There is no point

listening to these crooks. The only hope we have is of sticking together. This time it really does mean "an injury to one is an injury to all."

Secondly, industrial action is the way to win. Strike action is what has always terrified them. Hospital workers have tremendous power. When the last Coalition forced the Health Boards to bring in charges for out-patient visits, the refusal of LGPSU members was enough to stop it.

Unfortunately, a number of union leaders have already begun to lose their nerve. They say that lobbying is better than industrial action. At the recent LGPSU conference, they tried to say that cuts would only be fought by "political action rather than industrial action." But there are two types of politics. The first is where you plead from a position of weakness. The other is where you demand from a position of strength.

We should remember the tax protests. After a few days of action against the unfair tax system, the ICTU called off the action and advised workers to get out petitions and lobby the TDs. They had the cheek to tell us that this was "political action". We lost hands down!

**We need to build on the determination that has been shown in the strikes and demonstrations. We need to: Escalate the action:**

The experience of the one-day limited action from other workers has been dismal. The ESB workers tried it — they beaten. In the long run it is seen to go nowhere and demoralisation

sets in. One-day actions can be very useful in building up confidence and breathing life back into the unions. But to go forward we need to step up the action.

### Refuse to collect the £10

#### levy:

No hospital workers should collect this levy. The working class of this country already pay through the nose in taxes for their health service. Why should they pay again?

There are some who will argue that if the levy is not collected, the cuts will get worse. It is the wrong way of looking at it. The cuts will get even worse if we don't stand up to O'Hanlon. Next year they will be back for more if they see the hospitals as a soft target. If Fianna Fail get through the £10 charge, they will take it as a sign of weakness and will not make the slightest concession on any other front.

### Organise for solidarity action:

We need the support of other workers. They are directly affected by the cuts — the rich will get into the private clinics in the Mater and Blackrock. It is possible to win support including industrial action if enough pressure is built up.


During the nurses strike in Britain in 1981-82 against the cuts and privatisation, they sent out pickets to the miners and the dockers. These pickets were respected.

In Poland, when the Solidarnosc union was built into their programme, other workers must support the fight of the health workers.

We can win that type of solidarity here too. But it must be prepared for. Delegations should be sent to the major workplace and union branch meetings. They should argue the case clearly and patiently. They should go to the local Trades Councils and look for industrial action from other workers.

### Organise the rank-and-file

Union organisation in the hospitals has been weak. But we need to bring every worker into the campaign if we are to win. We need regular mass meetings in the hospitals. We need to elect anti cuts committees that will involve everyone in delegation work and explaining our case. We shouldn't just leave it up to those at the top of the union to do all the organising for us.



## JOIN US!

I would like more details about the Socialist Workers' Movement

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Send to SWM, PO Box 1648, Dublin 8.