

## **How did big business get to dictate healthcare?**

**By Bronwen Handyside**

How have we arrived at the position where the big private healthcare companies can now dictate to each individual throughout the UK what kind of healthcare we can have?

It is the result of more than two decades of lobbying and active interventions by the private healthcare companies directed at both Tory and Labour governments.

It arises out of a rotten political system involving an array of corrupt politicians from all the parties who voted in parliament over 21 years for the privatisation of healthcare services.

Their reward has come through profitable personal investments, and lucrative jobs once their political careers were over.

220 of the parliamentarians of all parties who voted on the Health & Social Care Act had shares in private healthcare companies.

The parliamentary system itself is corrupt because – after declaring their interests – there is nothing to stop politicians voting for their own personal profit.

The Health and Social Care Act itself was provided to politicians by the American private consultancy firm McKinsey.

McKinsey Partners and other staff regularly take senior jobs inside government. A former senior partner became chief of policy and strategy for Tony Blair from 2005 to 2007, and is now chairman and chief executive of Monitor, which regulates the new healthcare market and plays a crucial role in offering NHS business to private companies.

McKinsey now uses its inside knowledge to advise private companies on how to break into the healthcare market. It is also offering advice on commissioning to the Clinical Commissioning Groups which are now buying local NHS services.

Although some local CCGs have taken a stand against privatisation, recent surveys show that one in three GPs running the new CCGs also help run or hold shares in private healthcare firms.

The Competition Commission was forced to step in a couple of weeks ago because three major private healthcare companies have been overcharging for their services to the tune of £200 million a year. One in three of the 276,000 patients a year treated by one of the companies is funded by the NHS – six years ago it was just 3%. During the passage of the Health & Social Care Act, futile attempts were made to ensure greater financial scrutiny of private healthcare companies. Efforts were also

made to enshrine the care of patients above the payment of creditors in the event of firms failing. This was laughed out of court by the private healthcare companies, who said no bank would lend to an entity that prioritised human beings over repayment of debt.

These are very same banks we bailed out in 2008.

Parallel to and assisting in the avalanche of privatisation is the slashing of funding to the NHS by £20 billion by next year. and the McKinsey consultancy has also had a hand in this.

The internal market forced on the NHS has pushed up administration costs from 6 per cent in 1979 to 12%, and some academics estimate them now to be 20%.

The resulting cuts are stretching NHS services to the breaking point.

This is accompanied by a continuous barrage of propaganda against the NHS by pointing out the inevitable disastrous failures of care like mid-Staffordshire.

The private companies' 21 year strategy is virtually accomplished: the construction of a two-tier health system enshrining inequality at the very roots of society.

An inadequate, under-resourced state medical system picking up the complicated and expensive cases of the poor, running alongside a lucrative private healthcare system providing for the better-off and producing bloated profits for shareholders. I would ask all those with any connections to the Labour Party to demand it puts into its manifesto a commitment to

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expel all aspects of the market from the NHS, including the policy of “any qualified provider”, to take back from the private companies those services they have ripped off from the NHS, and to reinstate responsibility for the Secretary of State for the health service. If the Labour party will not commit to this, it should step aside in favour of a party that will.

I am proud to say that my union Unite is devoting all the resources it can into the campaign to defend the health service, and is a central moving force behind the TUC-sponsored demonstration at the Tory conference in Manchester.

Unite has also played a leading role in the launch of the People’s Assembly movement, which has since June resulted in 53 People’s Assembly meetings across the UK. The People’s Assembly is a significant step in integrating the forces of all our unions and local campaigns into one central movement nationally. This national movement must imminently turn into a European-wide movement to roll back the European Union’s austerity measures which lie behind the cuts to and privatisation of our health service – and the rest of the welfare state.

***Campaigners demonstrate in London to defend the National Health Service***



## **‘Everything is gradually getting better!’**

**Notes on the economy by Nick Bailey**

According to some recent reports the recession has ended and, in the words of the Brookings Institute, the global economy is “back on track” to resume steady recovery.

Germany's finance minister Wolfgang Schauble wrote in the Financial Times:

“The world should rejoice in the positive economic signals the eurozone is sending almost continuously these days”

But despite this positive message, no doubt intended to anaesthetise the public, it’s not hard to find somewhat more thoughtful commentators who are deeply worried about what this “recovery” means. Certainly they are agreed that pre-2008 growth rates will not be resumed.

John Pender writes in the Financial Times that “Britain has embarked on the wrong kind of recovery” ... a “credit fuelled boom” with little investment.

Several commentators picked up on remarks of Lord Turner (ex-head of the UK Financial Services Authority) to an audience of bankers in Stockholm to the effect that “western economies have become hooked on ever-expanding levels of debt”.

(This view has been nicely thrown into prominence by the crisis in the US over raising the debt limit – currently at \$16.7trn – and the spectre of the US defaulting on its creditors.)

Turner pointed out that according to the economic textbooks a bank exists to “raise deposits from savers and

then make loans to borrowers ... (and) primarily lend to firms/entrepreneurs to fund investment projects”. But this, he says, is now a fiction, as he calculates that in the UK a mere 15% of total financial flows actually go into investment projects.

The point is picked up by John Pender in another article. He writes:

“In the early 1980s economies in the developed world seem to have lost their ability to grow spontaneously. Larger and larger doses of debt have been required to keep them on an upward trajectory. The limits of such debt-fuelled growth were exposed by the financial crisis ... Debt cannot increase forever. The twin policy challenge today is thus to encourage the innovation that will permit a return to less debt-intensive growth and to find ways of reducing outstanding debt to manageable levels.”

Robin Harding, another FT columnist writes an article under the headline “America's economic growth is built on sand”.

This expresses a key feature of our period – the tendency of the productive forces of society, under the domination of finance capital, to stagnate.

Clearly all these commentators are signed-up friends of the current economic arrangements. Most have their good advice and pet solutions usually, in the form of better “regulation”.

Dream on!

# **“people and working class of Europe must build a broad front against economic war neo-liberalism has launched”**

**Speech by Syriza Member of the Greek Parliament Theano Fotiou at a fringe meeting at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in Bournemouth, UK, Monday 9 September 2013. Theano was official guest of the TUC.**

On behalf of “Solidarity for all”, I want to thank the Fire Brigades Union for their invitation. I am honoured to be with you as you as a guest of your annual Trades Union Congress.

I am here tonight because I strongly believe that the people and the working class of Europe have to build a broad front against the economic war that neo-liberalism has launched within the European Union; a mass front against austerity policies that attack economic and social rights and dismantle any social provision yet left in the welfare state.

I am here tonight because your people must not experience what the Greek people already have experienced.

There is a red thread that connects us. It is the common struggle against austerity, unemployment, recession, the axing of salaries and pensions, the tax plunder, the dissolution of labour rights and the collapse of the welfare state. They attack the role of the unions; they impose competitiveness as the main principle of life in order to “divide and rule” the working classes, to increase their profits, to lower the wages and turn the environment, the planet and any human activity into commodities.

This red thread connects us. It is the common struggle of our peoples; the strikes, the demonstrations, the peoples’ assemblies in the squares, the civil disobedience and the confrontations with the police.

It is a common thread that connects all the peoples of Europe, that attempted the first European-wide strike in recent decades, last year on 24 November 2012. It is this thread that builds the solidarity of the working class today, as the necessary condition for an end to the regime of austerity in Greece, Europe and the world.

I am here tonight in Bournemouth in order to weave and make visible this red thread of resistance – solidarity – Regime Change. In order to exchange experiences and practices and to build our common ideological and social arsenal. In order to tell, but also to learn from you.

As you may know, Greece has been chosen to become the testing ground of the “shock therapies” of the current capitalist crisis, with the implementation of the austerity memoranda and the bailouts. The neoliberal system started its experiments from Greece and it tries gradually to spread it all over Europe. Like back in the 1980s, when Thatcherism first hit the British working class and then spread to the rest



**Theano Fotiou**

of the globe. The Greek people, the working classes and their trade unions, have been resisting this assault with all their might. There have been over 20 general and mass strikes within the last three years, which along with the squares occupation movement, the “WON’T PAY” campaigns and the still-growing grass-roots social solidarity movement have contributed to and expressed the radicalisation and growing political strength of the Greek people.

This kind of popular mobilisation is what has been redefining the role of the Radical Left within the crisis. The active involvement of SYRIZA in these movement, the fact that it was inspired by them, that it heard their voice and incorporated their demands into its programme, is why SYRIZA is very significantly gaining in political strength.

Today, when the Health, Education and Public Administration sectors are yet once again under attack in Greece, our goal is to coordinate all struggles around one aim – to change this regime of harsh austerity with one slogan: “We must get rid of them!”

On the ground of economic crisis, Democracy has been destroyed. With the government a puppet of the Troika, the functioning of parliament has become a parody. The closing of the public broadcaster by the government and the dominant political system’s backing for private media, one

of the cornerstones of the system of corruption in Greece, have created a filthy alliance of lies and silencing. Under these conditions of economic crisis, political corruption and police “state of emergency”, fascism rises, in a country with a strong anti-fascist tradition; in Greece, who paid a big price in human lives and resources fighting the fascists during World War II; in Greece, a neo-Nazi party, “Golden Dawn”, hides its face using a pseudo-discourse against the crisis, exploiting people’s discontents to promote its venomous, racist, divisive policies against migrants, refugees, trade unionists, public sector workers, etc.

Thus the struggle against the crisis, against austerity, against poverty, against social collapse, for us is a struggle against racism and fascism, for the deepening of democracy, enhancing the people’s participation.

### **The face of the humanitarian crisis**

The economic and social destruction due to recession mean a 25% fall in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and above all sky-rocketing unemployment. Unemployment stands at 27% (officially 1 350 000 people). Four years ago it was 9.5%. Unofficially, the number is 2 million people. The unemployment rate for women is 32% and for the young people, the greatest victims of the Memorandum, between 55 and 62%. 350 000 people have lost their jobs over the past year and 60 000 businesses have closed. Each month 30 000 people lose their jobs.

Under Greek law, people drop out of the social security and health care system and lose their free access to public hospitals when they lose their jobs. This “free” access now costs at least 25 Euros.

Casual employment is on the increase, and the pension age has been increased to 67. Two million workers have not been paid for between 2 and 5 months. Pension schemes have been cut by up to 40%. The “haircut” of Greek state bonds caused a loss of 70% in the real value of social security fund deposits.

Wages and pensions have fallen by up to 53-50%. Over the last three years the average income has decreased by 40-50%. Fifty per cent of the active population say they are ready to emigrate in order to find work.

The public welfare state – education, health, food and housing – is collapsing.

As a result of all of this,

- Over 2 million people live below the poverty line
- Fifty percent of citizens cannot pay their taxes, loans and debts. They buy goods of inferior quality. Nowadays the governments allows food past its shelf life to be sold.
- People risk losing their houses. The government is willing to allow mass foreclosures by the end of the winter.
- People are not able to buy medicine, send their children to school, vaccinate them, or pay for basic goods.
- \* Or buy heating oil (consumption of which fell by 75% last year).
- Children are collapsing from hunger in the classroom.

Greece – a European country – is facing the results of war during a period of peace.

However, beyond the Greece of crisis and misery, another Greece is being created. A country of a people who get self-organised for survival and resistance. Thousands of people all over Greece, men and women, young and old, employed and unemployed, native and migrant, of different political and ideological beliefs, have created a unique mass movement of resistance and solidarity, shouting and practicing the slogan: “No one will be left alone in the crisis!”

The movement has its backbone in the unemployed and the women, pensioners and migrants. The participation of thousands of people has turned this grass-roots movement into a thriving public sphere of real democracy, social solidarity and resistance, far removed from any notion of bourgeois charity. A vast network of solidarity has emerged in six fields:

1. Health: social clinics-pharmacies
2. Food shortages: social kitchens and food distribution, social groceries “without middlemen”, direct producer to consumer markets
3. Social and solidarity economy of co-ops
4. Social classes – social music schools
5. Legal support teams / immigrants’ support
6. Social cultural centres

The neighbourhood is the focal place of their activities and the assembly – open to all – is the form within which they function, direct democracy the way they take decisions, and where both activists and those whose needs the structure addresses have equal rights.

### **“Solidarity for all”**

“Solidarity for all” is a new structure that has emerged out of this experience and by activists of the Radical Left. Its aim is:

\* To facilitate the interaction between social solidarity structures all over Greece which work in the framework of self-organisation / resistance / solidarity. We do not represent the 300 structures, but we facilitate and communicate their activities, experience and knowledge.

- We spread the message that people have to take their lives into their own hands
- We organise nationwide campaigns for solidarity (like the campaign for a bottle of olive oil for every unemployed person, or for school materials for every child).
- We organise international campaigns for solidarity with the Greek people on a political and economic level.
- What we have learnt is that, beyond providing a direct answer to the problems of pauperisation, social structures of solidarity create a new public sphere, a new paradigm of social organisation and political intervention from below.
- These are models of social reform in which self-organisation, direct democracy and participation take the first role.
- They are social incubators of political discontent, but they are also places where political consciousness and trust is established

- They have a great impact on their neighbourhoods. They know and work with thousands of people. They are trusted and gain the necessary social grounding.

Syriza politically supports this field of action by giving it political legitimisation, without trying to dominate them.

### **New steps and perspectives**

They are now taking steps to link trade union struggles more strongly with the people's resistance. We want to connect the activities of the social solidarity movement with people on strike and those who are losing their jobs in the health, education and public administration sectors.

At the same time the self-organised solidarity movement expands on a new level – the level of production. We already have attempts to run self-managed factories (such as the VIOME factory in Salonika, or factories in Euboea), newspapers, radio stations, etc., and now attempts to bring abandoned land back into production and empty buildings back into use, and harvest abandoned crops under the slogan: "They destroy – we create! They close – we open schools, hospitals, factories"!

We should all create a broadly effective paradigm which deconstructs in practice the Memorandum's doctrine of "growth through destruction and mass privatisation". The examples of the social solidarity movement create a paradigm that encourages the people, gives them hope that "there is another future, another prospect", which strengthens their resistance for political change. People do not any longer mobilise by abstract political and ideological

discourses, but rather by concrete social and political action which paves the way tangibly towards a solution of their actual needs.

Last but not least, this solidarity movement aspires to contribute, to the best of its ability, to the creation of a new international solidarity movement of the people of Europe, the Mediterranean and beyond. We are very proud about the creation of the Greece Solidarity Campaign in the UK. We receive a lot of help and courage from you. Going further in our common struggles, we would like to link the activities of the health, food, education etc. structures more firmly to the various British trade unions and their Greek counterparts.

The situation we face is unprecedented. We must go forward step by step, all together, inside and outside Greece, trying to make the most of every opportunity we get to strengthen the bond which connect us and to share our practices. The Greek people conduct their struggle with dignity and power, with passion and good humour, drawing strength from an historical tradition of struggle, in Greece but also internationally.

The needs are massive. There are plenty of ways to join in. We invite you to communicate with us, to dare to experiment with new ways of resisting and to join us in forging a path together towards our common future.

For Solidarity, resistance, political change!

For a future without exploitation, racism and capitalism!

## **“TUC, Put pressure on multi-national corporations!”**

**Interview with Amirul Haque Amin, President, National Garment Workers Federation, Bangladesh**

I am in the UK now for the Congress of the TUC. They invited me to come as an international guest.

The problems of the garment and textile sector are a big issue all over the world. There is a lot going on in the UK over garments and textile and the TUC invited me here from that point of view.

I am taking the opportunity to talk about our main problems and telling our TUC comrades that there are nowadays three problem areas:

- Safe workplaces
- Living wage
- Right to organise

Among these three, the first two are directly bound up with the multi-national corporations sourcing their goods in Bangladesh. Many of them are based in the UK.

Many people already know about the collapse of the Rana Plaza building on April 24, 2013 near Dhaka. 1 133 workers died and another 1 500 were injured.

Five months before Rana Plaza, on 24 November 2012, there was a fire at the Tazreen Fashion factory in Ashulia, a district on the outskirts of Dhaka. 112 workers died and 150

were injured. That is proof that today's workplaces in the garment and textile sector are unsafe.

There is an agreement called Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Accord. Eighty-six multi-national corporations have already signed this accord. Only six have not signed it. So that is why I ask the TUC delegates to put pressure on those companies.

Up to now workers have been earning very poor wages, as little as £25 per month (between £32 and £42 for a skilled worker).

We need to raise wages, but until pressure is put on the multi-national corporations, it won't happen.

We put pressure on local factory owners in Bangladesh, but this is related to the price of the products, so the multi-national corporations can tell the suppliers to pay a living wage to the workers, but on the other hand they are always pressurising the suppliers to drop the price.

That is why we ask the TUC to put pressure on the multi-national corporations to provide a better price to ensure better salaries or wages.'

# **Anti-Fascist Action for Greece (AAfG)**

**A group has been established by Greek anti-fascists living and working in the United Kingdom**

## **Why we decided to form AAfG**

The murder of the Greek anti-fascist activist and hip-hop artist Pavlos Fyssas (“Killah P”) by neo-Nazi ‘Golden Dawn’ thugs sent shock waves throughout Greece and the Globe. It revealed the true colours of fascism in Greece, its infiltration into many layers of Greek society and the establishment (e.g. the Police and other parts of the State), as well as its capacity to attack, terrorise, and murder, both the most vulnerable as well as the most progressive parts of Greek society, and finally its will to physically eliminate its political enemies.

Understanding the deeper causes of this phenomenon, disseminating information and facts about fascist attacks and anti-fascist actions in Greece along with coordinated joint action by anti-fascist forces here in the UK is more crucial than ever.

In light of the above, on Saturday 21st September 2013, many of those who took part in the demonstration outside the UK Greek Embassy, called by various Greek and British antifascist/anti-racist organisations and other groups, gathered in Holland Park and agreed to issue a call for the constitution of a broad anti-fascist network aimed at developing a course of action to help combat fascism in Greece and the UK. Despite the recent Golden Dawn party MPs’ arrests and the criminal charges against them (including those setting-up and operating a criminal paramilitary-style organisation) the deeper causes of fascism in Greek society remain largely unaddressed. The unprecedented austerity policies, which have been enforced by the Memorandum governments in Greece during this devastating economy crisis under the directives of Troika (IMF, ECB, European Commission), as well as the intensified anti-immigration laws, the demonisation of immigrants by the media, and the extreme repression by the State and Police of any form of resistance against these measures, have provided fertile soil for the growth of fascist ideas in Greek society, and an open space for fascist organisations to operate.

## **Objectives**

Future initiatives of AAfG will focus on all possible options for anti-fascist action, such as raising awareness of the anti-fascist movement and the danger fascism presents, and sending the message across the public through all

available platforms. Initiatives shall include (but not be limited to):

Social and informational/educational events (e.g., public discussions, film screenings, university talks).

- Group mobilisations (e.g., protest assemblies / demonstrations).

- Linking up with the members and leaders of other British anti-fascist/anti-racist groups and organisations in order to join forces and to take collective action.

- Inviting journalists to AAfG activities, and building a relationship with the Press.

- Developing our (AAfG) social media presence (fb, twitter, blogs, mailing lists).

We aim to get our message across the Greek communities in Britain, as well as to the broader British public, other UK anti-fascist groups and organisations, trade unions, political parties, journalists and the Press, community leaders, immigrants, ethnic minorities, and people of all ethnicities and backgrounds who also struggle and take a stand against fascism and racism, and to anyone interested in defending social and democratic rights in our societies.

## **Call to action**

We are calling for the joint effort of all anti-fascist forces in the UK, in order to form the widest possible antifascist front. The rise of Golden Dawn in Greece during the last 3 years of economic austerity, its deadly campaign and entry as a political party in the Greek Parliament since the 2012 elections, the threat of similar organisations in the UK such as BNP, EDL, and others, which are gaining support and are increasingly becoming acceptable political forces, all raise serious questions about the rise of fascism, the purposes and interests fascist organisations serve, and the increasing adoption of the far-right agenda and rhetoric by mainstream parties across Europe. We call upon people of all ages and backgrounds, as well as individuals without particular political affiliations, who are interested in our cause, to join the AAfG, to take part in our meetings, and activities, and to contribute with their ideas in our efforts to fight fascism and the extreme right in our countries.

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