

copy

The Editor,
The Guardian,
119 Farringdon Road,
LONDON EC1

30th September 1987

Dear Sir,

Since the Election, we have experienced two major trends in the National Health Service which point to the existence of a national corporate plan which aims to extend the frontiers of private medicine into previously 'untouchable' areas and neutralise or excise pockets of opposition within Health Authorities.

Hospital General Managers are now brazen enough to argue openly that they can only fulfil their medical responsibilities to the community if they commercialise every saleable service within their hospitals. They have also given the begging bowl, so common in the days preceding the NHS, a new respectability; thus we see overpaid 'yuppies' from the City of London responding to an appeal at St. Bartholomew's Hospital to donate their 'unskilled' labour to the hospital at weekends (their money could at least have paid the wages of a few nurses), with consequences for patient care which can only be dire.

Enthusiastic managers (of the Griffiths-Sainsbury breed) are now even trying to privatise sophisticated scientific disciplines such as pathology, where the dreadfully low standards so common amongst privatised hospital services (like laundry and cleaning) would have consequences so terrible that even to contemplate them would be beyond the comprehension of most reasonable people. We refer here to services like AIDS testing, cervical smear screening and blood cross matching, which are carried out by highly motivated medical laboratory scientists.

The opposition on Health Authorities, which once condemned and fought privatisation of hospital services, is now more often seen shedding crocodile tears into the same urn as their more right-wing colleagues and hospital administrators, as they stand united in defence of limited commercialisation of NHS services in order to fund the treatment of NHS patients. The ideological flagship of a service free at the point of use and paid for out of general taxation now seems to have abandoned English waters, and to have docked in Scottish ports serving a nation which has resisted the destruction of its NHS in a way we can only envy.

The latest head-on attack is against the solitary trade union seats on District Health Authorities. At least twelve trade unionists have been prevented from taking their seats on Health Authorities, and amongst them are several who despite active participation in the work of their Authorities have been