

The Case for an Independent Scotland

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As someone in their second tour of duty in the NHS I have witnessed the changes in the nature and functioning of the NHS first hand. Having also been employed by the engineering and finance industries in the private sector, I recognise that the most striking characteristic of the NHS in Scotland today is the corporatisation - not just of the health service itself - but of the culture and working environment. This direction of travel was set in motion decades ago but has been taken up with increasing fervour by successive Conservative, Labour and Coalition Governments.

Westminster governance has steered the NHS away from its original – but still popularly regarded – *raison d'être* of a national health care system toward a fractured, market-driven system where health care professionals compete with each other for business, and ill health is a commodity to be traded. The tax payer not only has to pay to put this system in place but has to pick up the tab where it is not profitable.

A key weapon in the assault on the NHS is PFI style contracts. Driven by Westminster Governments, these initiatives have been financially disastrous for the NHS customarily costing more than if the service or assets had been acquired directly. Even where it is 'demonstrated' value for money is 'delivered' the figures have often been manipulated and commercial confidentiality makes it near impossible to ascertain the veracity of information. A prime example is the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary where, being less than a third into the contract term, the initial costs set aside have already been used up and renegotiations of terms were only undertaken in order to avoid the implosion of the deal.

The corporations have feasted on guaranteed PFI profits which not only sucks money out of the health service but out of the UK economy as many of the companies financing consortia are

registered in tax havens. While acute services have burst at the seams with services such as A&E and laboratories on their knees, health care professionals feel obligated to work themselves to exhaustion to prevent services grinding to a halt; all in the shadow of a Health Minister who can now close hospitals at his own caprice.

At the core of this transformation is the tyranny of targets, central in providing the NHS with its darkest hour in the shape of Mid Staffordshire and here in Scotland with the Waiting List shame, where the Chief Executive at NHS Lothian oversaw the falsification of figures and withheld treatment to patients. It is also a significant factor in forging a workplace environment based on fear, intimidation and bullying.

The trumpeted UK safety net is, therefore, a myth. Economically, the pro-union campaign is arguing that we cannot afford current levels of social services, despite the ratings agencies contradicting this view. But the same ideologically indistinguishable UK parties have signed up to a strategy of dismantling that safety net anyway! For the NHS in Scotland, the only future voting 'No' will deliver will be that of the deluded 16th century quack bleeding the NHS close to death with incessant cuts while their remedy for recovery is to sharpen the scalpel and order more leaches.

What the referendum offers is an opportunity to decouple from this Westminster contrived destruction of the NHS and opt for an alternative strategy for health service provision based on need and not the prospect for tax dodgers to line their pockets. Note that the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) emphasises that the referendum is for those people living in Scotland (whatever their ethnic, national or cultural origin or preference) to reject submission to the neo-con agenda of Westminster. It is not about an election of an independent nationalist government.

Publicly owned and administrated national health care in Scotland pre-dates the foundation of the NHS. The current Scottish Government has attempted to secure that and to militate against the worst features of Westminster policies, for example, progressive initiatives such as free prescriptions and care for the elderly. The NHS Scotland is not yet in the jaws of the beast as our health colleagues and fellow citizens down south are.

The impact of a 'Yes' vote - in RIC's view - is that it will mark an end to the current destruction of accessible health care which will exacerbate the place Scotland has as the "Sick Person of Europe". It opens up the potential to start building a civilised society with quality health care, housing and education at its base. A 'No' vote shackles us to the current ruination of the NHS and closes the door to any alternative.

What gives RIC supporters cause for optimism is the fundamental characteristic about the 'Yes' campaign itself: broad and inclusive – as a health care system should be - with a vision of a healthier, happier society. This is in direct contrast to the narrow, distant and elitist nature of RIC's political adversaries - particularly Westminster governments. For RIC supporters, a 'Yes' vote means another Scotland is possible.