

Dear members,

Kindness and Togetherness:

My vision for the Socialist Health Association has always been one where we worked in a kindly and respectful way, coming together to discuss how to achieve the best and most influential of policies relating to the health and wellbeing of every one of our citizens. Our obvious attraction for members, and one which makes us unique, is the work we do as a labour Party Affiliate. We should be working always to true Socialist values. The language of the market and of privatisation is not one we should adopt, and their principles, should be fought at every turn. I think the words which both sent a shiver of fear, and a determination to fight, through me were from a South Korean activist on the NHS. "They will not let you keep it".

It is becoming more obvious as we live with the worst government in living memory, that we are fighting not just for us, not just for the UK, but for the world. Our responsibility is huge, and every one of us must play our part. So, let us forget any perceived differences, and join in solidarity to save our principles and policies for the organisation, the country and even the wider world. Let us enable the NHS and our welfare system, to be "A beacon of hope to the world", as my South Korean friend put it. We must not let them extinguish it!! I really want us to focus on trust and cooperation, our policy work, first and foremost, on rebuilding our reputations and finances, and securing a strong base from which we can move upwards,

A flavour of some of my recent work:

Parliamentary:

Yesterday I attended the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Care. I was lucky enough to be called to speak twice, for 5 or more minutes a time. I am also the Chair for Health and Care for the National Pensioners Convention (1.5 million members) and founded by Jack Jones, and Policy lead for several other national organisations. I am responsible for health and care for around 2 million members. That means I have an influential voice when speaking truth to power!! I made sure SHA policies, and our Care Policy Paper was highlighted – and when it is approved (and I think our Mental Health Policy Paper will also be relevant), we have been asked to input them.

I was very taken aback both by the composition of the attendees – a lot of provider organisations, and a handful of disabled people (including me), and nobody representing children, older people, carers, or, and very importantly, the interests of poorer people and the working class. Instead the talk was of the wonderful way personal, and personally managed, personal budgets were enabling people with generous funding. I do not object to generous funding, but this is not the lived experience of the vast majority. There was also talk of the community sorting out safeguarding issues from the people enthusing about personal budgets. Some communities might self-regulate in this way, but my experience says it is all too often otherwise. I will offer a couple of examples: A vulnerable colleague suffered a financial wipe-out of his savings by his two carers. He was too trusting of his carers, but they were his individual choice, and funded by his personal budget. I had

to give evidence for a girl with learning difficulties sexually abused by a Community Transport Driver. Allegations of abuse brought to the people running the service were ignored.

Attacks on the elderly and disabled are on the increase. The voices of those affected are being silenced, and those of us who are disabled agreed while we had to be there, and be heard, it was difficult hearing the same old arguments and lack of action for over 30 years. Under the Conservatives we are actually going backwards as far as the majority is concerned. The content of my theme in speaking to the APPG, as always, was very much to speak up for our values and to advocate to ensure unrepresented groups voices are heard, plus of course, for us to have more influence.

Unions:

I spoke recently at a Unite Branch meeting on behalf of the SHA. Much of my training and support was through the Unions. My father, brother and I, were bullied and eventually we lost our jobs, as the Civil Service was politicised by Thatcher, and we fought for members and ordinary workers tooth and nail, despite bribes in my case, and threats to my brother and father, and then later me. I believe our Unions are a crucial factor in these dark days, while fighting for workers' rights, they are also fighting for workers health. The Unite Branch has asked me to continue working with them around their health policies, thanked me for an inspiring talk, and has affiliated to us.

Papers:

I have written a paper on Trade deals and medications (and wider). A precis has gone to members, and Justin Madders as a Shadow Health Minister. I have been at pains to point out it is not SHA policy. I have also written a paper, not yet published, but due in the next few months, on NHS staffing.

Speaking:

I go to a lot of meetings, with all sorts of different hats, but all my hats are compatible with my strong socialist beliefs. I speak for us positively wherever and whenever I can. At another Parliamentary meeting, for example I was able to speak up for the health and welfare of military vets. I also do this work internationally. I spoke for the SHA at the Labour Party Conference in September, and at one of our fringes. My involvement in both the NHS and care has been continuous over 70 years, and from all perspectives.

Shadow Health team and other NHS and Social Care concerns:

I have regular meetings with the Shadow Health Team Shadow minister for the NHS, Justin Madders. We have known each other long enough to be honest, over a cuppa, which is helpful. I have learned to trust him over the years as a man of principle, even if I disagree with the principle – not

something I can say about many politicians. At the APPG meeting yesterday I did know a couple of the leads: James Bullion, the Vice President of ADASS: I was a speaker at their national conference a bit back, and Andy Tilden interim CEO of Skills for care (with another hat). I also work locally. I am shortly attending a meeting about their “Corporate strategy” I hope it doesn’t mean what it says on the tin – I am deeply unimpressed!! There may be a few choice words – diplomatically expressed (of course). I am also concerned about gagging – this is a nightmare vision of a US style system.

The above are just examples.

IT and Admin:

I have supervised and supported our Admin in running/providing information for no less than 3 ballots in the last few weeks. The nominations ballot ran smoothly, and without any complaints. Information provision for the Labour Party for the ballot was time consuming and difficult. It was the same for all the Socialist societies, however our current liaison was efficient and helpful, lessening any frustrations. She and the IT team really seemed to know their stuff, and despite the difficulties we got there in the end, which is what really matters to members. Ken was sometimes working to 3am (from 9am) and was very worried he would not give members the optimum service they deserved. He has done more than you will ever know. He teamed up with two other IT professionals to discuss a forward-facing policy on this side of the organisation. Pressure of work made one withdraw, however we are lucky to have retained the support of an international expert in the field. We have no leeway financially for some of the changes, but they seemed confident there could be improvements made with little or no financial cost. In short, all is working now, as the recent heavy use of our databased has shown. Our Website has been a source of inspiration for likeminded groups and organisations (watch this space, we are hopefully going to have a mention in a booklet on Addison’s and housing). In a time of financial pressures, it will not fail us, and improvements can be made in times when we have the adequate funding to do so, if we wish.

Social Media

As secretary I have overall responsibility for this and am happy to continue with Facebook and the Website. I started off in this field with Arthritis Care (National), setting up their online presence as a 2-person team. I originated their online policies, and understand the issues involved. Regarding the SHA it is a pretty well-oiled machine. If someone sends us an article or paper for the website, I will check it for adherence to our policies and Admin uploads it (not the easy proposition it sounds in some cases). Some people have access directly, but we also monitor their input. Because we work so seamlessly, this work is done quickly and efficiently. Regarding Facebook, I already come with strong socialist and labour contacts, and am sent more material than we can effectively use (you will know what I mean if you have a Facebook page). I upload several articles and links daily, and check for flaming trolling and so on. If an article is popular this can be an issue but takes seconds to correct. Our Articles can have up to nearly 4 thousand looks and shares per article, if I work it correctly. This is a 24/7 commitment, and I would like to thank Gurinder Singh Josan for his offer of help – the only one. I googled him and was surprised to find: Gurinder Singh Josan is lifelong Labour Party member, a Director of anti-racism campaign HOPE not Hate, a school Governor, founder and Vice Chair of Sikhs for Labour and a member of West Midlands Strategic Police & Crime Board. I do have input for our media from Hope not Hate, so I was excited by this, and hope

Gurinder will liaise with them, both for information and to help populate our social media outlets in their support even more effectively. As regards Twitter, I have requested access, and am happy to take this on, however Jos bell, our London Chair and Central council member, has been tweeting on our behalf very frequently from a London perspective. She has a LOT of followers. I have issued a request to Jenny Formby on behalf of us Officers and Vice chairs around the problems highlighted in the press and elsewhere on election issues around validities – especially postal ballots. There has been no reply to SHA thus far.

Membership and Group and Branch issues:

The membership lists are up to date, though there have been problems regarding our current constitution and issuing of reminders to lapsed members. Tony Beddow (Vice Chair) is aware of our problems around this, and they will be addressed. It has been thrown into relief as we have been on the cusp of denying members a vote prior to advising them they have lapsed, and Paypal issues meant that automatic renewal was not an option. Admin is currently working on the correction to this, which has been delayed by our AGM and Labour Party obligations but will be taken up immediately we have the capacity – in the next week, I think. We have done a lot of work with our Groups and Branches, to ensure they feel included and connected to the national body – indeed they can make their needs known and this will be worked on, or at the least explained. Our working branches are thriving now, thanks in part, to a brainwave by our Admin to issue our consented lists to the Secretaries in their areas for recruitment (the people on this list have consented, so no GDPR issues). These lists were never used previously. Work still needs to be done to support our Groups. We must ensure Wales and Scotland feel supported, but not directed by the National. I would like to propose we send them a letter expressing our solidarity and respect and support for their work. It would be good to set up a Group in Ireland. I do have contacts, but this needs more support and probably a personal connection (maybe Skype or Zoom) to kick start things. The lead by our Irish members in the National would be a great place to start, perhaps? Then we have areas with no Branches at all. We are all such busy people, that taking on a Branch leadership role can be a difficult decision to make. I did try to rejuvenate or start a couple of new groups, and of course they would have our full support. I work with other organisations where this is an issue, we are not alone, and I don't know of anywhere such recruitment is easy. I hope that much more work, in an organised fashion, can be undertaken.

Finally, I can remember smiles, and even laughter at our meetings. We live in difficult and dark times, and our interactions should not add to a feeling of gloom. We are all brilliant, so let us rejoice in that fact, and smile and be kind. Speak positively, and care. I know I often feel like crying when I look at what we are up against, and I know we all do. We all need the support of each other.

Jean Hardiman Smith (Hon Sec)