



Socialist Health Association: Labour Public Health Policy

Monday 25th September 2017

Panel: Alex Scott-Samuel (Chair), Dr Wanda Wyporska (The Equality Trust), Sharon Hodgson MP (Shadow Minister for Public Health)

Dr Wanda Wyporska, Executive Director of The Equality Trust

Wyporska's contribution was largely about what statistics show us about the state of the nation's public health since 2010, with her repeatedly stressing that she was not allowed to be political. Wyporska used the example of a friend who had to travel 20 miles to find an open maternity ward because the two nearest were closed, showing her friend's privilege in being able to drive and have a mother who was a midwife. There has been an increase in infant mortality associated with socioeconomic status. The gains of the past have been undone. Similarly, the number of those with learning disabilities living in poverty is going up and Sure Start has been cut.

She pointed out that the global sustainable development goals are not just for developing countries, but for all of us, and domestically the picture hasn't been very good. There is accountability in Government and she is having meetings with Government on how to tackle the goals. The British Social Attitudes Survey shows that 81% think that income gaps are too large, and a tipping point has been reached in favour of higher taxes and spending - see the election results. The safety net is being seen more as a safety net, with a more positive attitude. Progress in the 1960s was easier to reverse because structures weren't changed. Citing *The Spirit Level* she said that in more unequal countries there are higher rates of mental/physical ill-health, higher incarceration levels, higher teenage pregnancy levels, higher obesity levels, lower trust levels, lower rates of social mobility, and lower educational attainment. The OECD, IMF, and World Bank are all not traditionally left-wing organisations, but are saying that inequality is an economic threat. It is also a threat to lives: in unequal areas healthy life expectancy is 15 years lower. Asked attendees to do something: inequality is a policy choice, calling for an inequality reduction strategy and campaigning for a socioeconomic duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010, but not enacted - a clause that she believes could have stopped austerity.

Sharon Hodgson MP, Shadow Minister for Public Health

Health is a crucial area of Government policy, particularly in the current environment for public services. A top priority should be to improve national health: this would increase productivity and make the NHS fighting fit for the future. Labour are prepared, but the NHS isn't as fighting fit as it should be due to Tory negligence. Despite accusations, Labour is not talking down the NHS, but will talk truth to power and you can never trust the Tories with the NHS. NHS England's forward review in March showed the pressures on the service, and showed the Government has failed to give the NHS the funding it deserves, especially on public health. It fell from the third top priority to being slotted into the 10-point efficiency plan. It can both save other services money in time, and should be the driver to make all live healthier lives, and to tackle entrenched health inequalities. At the

moment, initiatives do not go far enough as there is little space to invest money or time: everyone is just fire fighting and there is a lack of political will to act on determinants.

Analysis of DCLG data on public health spending by the King's Fund is not good, with sexual health and tobacco control facing cuts of over 30%. Real reductions in services are now happening, creating a 'perfect storm' with serious ramifications for the NHS. She argued that issues should be dealt with at source, with Labour promising a better vision for public health. At the General Election, the party offered a 'visionary and forward-thinking approach' to public health. It aimed to make the UK's children the healthiest in the world, by cutting down on the NHS's £250m payments to management consultants to create a Child Health Fund, underpinned by a Child Health Bill. A cross-departmental Child Obesity Strategy would be created, measuring four key indicators. Adverts for unhealthy food would be banned during prime-time, and she has just met the Advertising Standards Agency over the issue of Just Eat sponsoring the X-Factor. At the start of the summer Jonathan Ashworth (Shadow Secretary of State for Health) announced the creation of a Child Health Forum, where the party will work with experts to develop a programme for Government.

More widely, improving national health is a matter of social justice - a core Labour principle. Sir Michael Marmot's report showed that there is a social gradient in health: those in lower social positions have lower health, but this has not yet materialised in public health policy. More recently he has argued that the UK is becoming the sick man and woman of Europe, recording the slowest female life expectancy increase and second-slowest male life expectancy increase from 2011 to 2015. According to Hodgson, this is because the current Government's choice of austerity has stalled the work of previous governments and has been a significant factor in increasing poor health. However, she questioned why it took the last Labour government 13 years to pass the Equality Act. She mentioned her support for a number of initiatives: 1001 Critical Days, universal free school meals, and smoking and sexual issues. She cited the work of colleagues, such as Sue Hayman holding the Government to account on air quality, Sadiq Khan ensuring decent housing, Andy Burnham improving transport infrastructure, and the Welsh Government giving Public Health Wales powers to scrutinise new legislation. She argued that it is important to create systems in Government, not just to rely on values, as this makes it harder for the party's opponents to dismantle. She stressed the need to improve the role of Public Health England and local Directors of Public Health, address the social determinants of health and to realise the vision in the five-year forward view. People's life can't be determined by factors out of their control and a more equal, social just, healthier society can be achieved.