Social Partnership in the UK National Health Service

CRIMT-CIRA Conference
Université Laval
16-18 June 2010
The industrial relations partnership debate: 1997 - 2005

- Context:
  - New Labour ‘third way’
  - TUC Partnership Principles
  - American ‘mutual gains enterprise’ literature
- Union renewal – opportunity, risks
- Bacon & Samuel (2009)
  - 248 formal agreements 1990-2007
  - Accelerated rate of formation, 2000-7
  - Public sector concentration – NHS
    - Union density – professionals
    - Public sector modernisation
- Q: the character of the agreements
  - Multi-level (multi-union), tripartite, bipartite
  - Policy influence; concession ‘bargaining’; stalemate
Public sector modernisation: the public management debate

- A Post-New Public Management?
  - Tensions in NPM
  - Third Way political project of centre left
    - New objectives (alongside old)
    - New policy instruments
      - ‘soft regulation’ ... horizontal networks
      - State: steering, vertically joined up

- New Labour
  - Public expenditure investment (42% GDP 2006)
  - Central government performance management of public service organisations – continuity with 1992-7
    - Treasury’s Comprehensive Spending Review, Public Service Agreements
Partnership & NHS modernisation – England

2000-2005: investment for reform

- Targets & terror
  - Patient waiting times, HRM, Finance ...
  - HRM – employee involvement & partnership -
    - targets, PAs, unions, centralisation

- Capacity building
  - Private finance initiative (PFI, also LIFT); Independent Sector Treatment Centres ... versus union opposition

- Pay and grading ... and boundary spanning
  - Agenda for Change – non-medical staff
  - GP contracts, Consultant contracts

- Choice and Competition
  - Internal market + external players + tariffs + regulator

Keep Our NHS Public!
Social Partnership Forum

- TUC unions’ response on unions’ exclusion from policy
  - 2005 Commissioning for a Patient Led NHS
- Government ‘efficiency turn’ 2005/6
- Revised Social Partnership Forum – 2006/7
  - Tri-partite: 16 unions, NHS Employers, Dept of Health
  - Not the National Stakeholder Forum – policy discussion
  - Secretariat (department of health)
  - Fund
  - Web-site
- Rules:
  - Discuss workforce implications of policy
  - Roles & responsibilities
    - Minister as Chair
  - Principles of effective working
    - a ‘no surprise culture’
  - Benefits – mutual understanding, better NHS services
- Involvement & Participation Association – Review
Roles & Character?

- **Policy implementation**
  - must be ‘productive’ to become embedded (and safe) re. national leaderships **RCN, Unison**
  - *Knowledge & Skills Framework, Agenda for Change*
  - Preparing for pandemics
  - Productivity deficit reduction ... but loss of unity
  - Staff passport – mobility in healthcare labour market

- **Partnership diffusion: connectiveness**
  - **Regional** level partnership forums
    - strategic planning – but foundation trusts?
    - ‘because it’s required’ – SHA
    - ‘a sop to the unions’ – GMB steward
  - **Local**: partnership and workforce engagement
• Case study trust, 2010
  • Stewards’ radicalisation
    • ‘we’re more comfortable with collective bargaining than partnership’
    • ‘the JCNC gets bogged down with matters that should have been dealt with locally ... if there was partnership working’
    • ‘managers haven’t bought into partnership and as a result we can’t buy in’
    • Union capacity issues and ‘too many are interested in recruitment not representing’
    • Union representation on the Board, ‘but no more rights than are given to the public’ (user voice)
- PFI new hospital build
- Workforce shift: hospital to community
- Skills dilution on ‘the productive ward’
- Staff attitude survey: mentoring v training & skills

SPF meeting, March (IPA organised): ‘the message was all about pulling together through more difficult times’
Social Partnership Forum Policy influence?

- NHS preferred supplier status – Dept. of Health, end 2009
- TUC unions within SPF
- Public service industry (PS) = private sector, response ...

... longevity?