

‘FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE’ WHAT HAS THE NHS DONE FOR US?

‘From the cradle to the grave.’ That was the promise of the NHS when it was founded 70 years ago. And that promise has been kept. Millions of lives have been saved. A free health service available to all when they need it.

AND NOW ITS VERY EXISTENCE IS UNDER THREAT.

The Tory Government has starved the NHS of funds for the last eight years. Hospitals and A&Es are closed, services withdrawn, GPs put under enormous pressure as health bosses pile on the pressure to make savings. Mental health services, especially for young people have almost disappeared in many areas. And public health services like health visiting and school nursing have been slashed since Lansley transferred them to local authority control.

The Tories have a political plan. It’s to end the NHS as a universal service. As hip and knee replacements, cataract surgery, have increasingly long waiting times, anyone who can afford it will “go private”. That’s a deliberate policy outcome. It’s why we have Virgin and Nuffield opening so many private hospitals (using NHS trained surgeons) to make a profit out of the deliberate rundown of the NHS. So, the NHS becomes increasingly a backstop for those too poor to go anywhere else and to treat emergencies which are too costly for the private sector to make an easy profit.

Any potentially profitable bits left are carved out with the intention of selling them off through mechanisms like the establishment of US-inspired Accountable Care Organisations. Or the private sector makes its money through new PFI-type deals – the latest initiative “Project Phoenix”.

Health workers are hit not just through privatisation. Wages have declined year on year – and the latest pay deal will not reverse that.



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Bullying and stress increase with an increasing workload from too few staff attempting to treat too many patients – the safety of both staff and patients is being put at risk.

THE TORIES TRY TO PUSH THE BLAME ELSEWHERE.

“The NHS is inefficient.” Except the Commonwealth Fund consistently ranks the NHS as “the best, safest and most affordable” of 11 developed nations.

“Health tourism.” Its miniscule. Jeremy Hunt’s pilot scheme last autumn cost more to run than was collected from so-called health tourists (which would include people injured on holiday!). Aneurin Bevan was right – and NHS free for all who need it irrespective of their nationality is “a civilised principle” that “Conservatives have tried to exploit ... to discredit socialised medicine.”

"We can't afford it – too many old people".

The number of elderly people shouldn't be a surprise – they've been around for a long time! And it should be seen as a good thing that people are living longer. But, of course we can afford decent healthcare. Collect tax from the big companies that don't pay. Remove the waste caused by the market in the NHS. Stop paying profits to the privateers. Cancel Trident replacement.... The list is endless.

SO, CAN WE STOP THEM?

Yes! Round the country, campaigners have been successful in stopping closures and saving services. They have done it when they have mobilised large numbers from their communities to oppose the cuts. A community aroused puts pressure on all elected politicians whatever their party.

To fight for a local hospital, you don't have to accept a complete set of alternative economic policies. You can fight for what immediately matters to you. A recent opinion poll found that 59% of Conservative voters said that the foundation of the NHS was what made them proud to be British." Campaigners need to turn this potential support for the NHS into active campaigning support. Victories matter. If we save a local hospital, then everybody who has been involved in that campaign feels stronger – they don't just have to accept what's handed down to them. It matters that we stopped the NHS providing information about immigrants to the Home Office. We can build collective strength.

SOLIDARITY IS KEY

Trade unionists have a vital role to play. It's not just about terms and conditions. Health trade unionists need to build workplace organisation that can take on these cuts. We all know that the NHS would not run without the dedication of the workforce to its ideals. So, lets make those ideals a trade union issue.

All trade unionists, whatever their industry, can bring their collective strength to campaigning for the NHS in their communities. We may be a long way away from that time in the 1970s when the Scunthorpe steel workers came out on strike in support of a nurses pay claim, but we need to recreate that spirit of solidarity.

Whatever else, we can't simply wait for a Labour Government. There is no guarantee we will get one before the Tories have destroyed our NHS.

We might get one sooner, though, if Labour was campaigning vigorously to save the NHS and coming out with the policy statements to back it up. Unfortunately, the Labour leadership are not doing that. When May announced £20bn extra for the NHS, where were the Labour politicians saying that's not enough, we need at least £50bn? What's happened to the demand from last years labour party conference resolution to return NHS expenditure to the average of Western European levels? Why will they only bring services back into the NHS when the contracts run out? 'Fiscal responsibility' might impress big business, but it does nothing to help defend our NHS.

Winning campaigns to save the NHS can do much more than prevent closures and cuts. They can change the whole political landscape. We can encourage politicians, especially Labour ones, to change tack.

The job of socialists and campaigners is not just to protest, it's to help change and improve the lives of working people. People should join Keep Our NHS Public (<https://keepournhspublic.com>), and affiliate their campaign or union branch to Health Campaigns Together. **With the wealth of support that exists for the NHS, this is a battle we can win.**



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