

TORY HEALTH PLANS ARE SICK

Our prescription: mass trade union action to save the NHS

A north London health worker

Tory health secretary Andrew Lansley has said that the government will “pause, listen and engage” before continuing with NHS ‘reforms’. For this read ‘wait, spin and ignore’ until after the local government elections in the hope of avoiding a drubbing.

Many media commentators have reported an apparent wavering by the Con-Dems in their plans to drive their ‘Health and Social Care Bill’ through parliament. This legislation represents a giant leap toward total privatisation of the NHS – with big business licking its lips at the prospect of making enormous profits. But we shouldn’t be fooled

by announcements that this attack may be watered down.

However, the recent show of strength by half a million organised workers on the TUC demo in London and opinion polls showing high levels of satisfaction with the NHS, have had some effect on David Cameron and his ministers. With more pressure the government may yet be forced to back down.

Relentless attacks

What’s in a name? It’s a curiosity of history that the Holy Roman Empire wasn’t holy, Roman or an empire. Are we soon to have a National Health Service (NHS) that is neither national nor a health service but

competing bodies moving steadily toward the status of private companies, some via the camouflage of ‘social enterprises’?

The Tories in particular feel they have perhaps the first real opportunity to get rid of the NHS – an important and symbolic victory for socialism in our history. They are unlikely to substantially reverse direction without maximum pressure.

We must not slacken our resolve to defeat this attempt to drag us toward an inefficient and socially destructive US-style free-for-all in health care, in which workers and the poor are unable to afford private medical insurance. Campaigns and action must continue and be stepped up, especially in the workplace.

Workers in the NHS are already feeling the effects of government moves to full privatisation. Across the country nurses and other staff are finding their jobs being ‘down-banded’ or deleted. Services are facing massive cutbacks, particularly in specialist areas such as mental health.

A relentless series of attacks to reduce labour costs is taking place to prepare the ground for profit making. Waiting lists are increasing, elective surgery is being reduced, preventive medicine is being sidelined.

The mainstream media continues to repeat the line that health commissioning is being handed over to GPs. It is not. The commissioning

function will be largely carried out by private consultancies and the big four accountancy firms.

The pressure is on the health trade unions, including the largest, Unison, to organise an effective fightback. Such a campaign must unite health workers and community campaigners in defence of the NHS as a fully publicly funded and democratically run public health service.

The government assault on the NHS is part of its general offensive to rip apart our public services and accelerate privatisation. The trade unions must come together in a 24-hour public sector general strike as a starting point to roll back the privatisation juggernaut.

What we stand for

The Socialist Party fights for socialist change – a democratic society run for the needs of all and not the profits of a few. We also fight, in our day-to-day campaigning, for every possible improvement for working-class people.

As capitalism dominates the globe, the struggle for genuine socialism must be international.

The Socialist Party is part of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI), a democratic, socialist international that organises in over 40 countries.

Our demands include:

Work and income

- Trade union struggle to increase the minimum wage to £8 an hour without exemptions as an immediate step towards £10 an hour. For an annual increase in the minimum wage linked to average earnings.
- All workers, including part-timers, temps, casual and migrant workers to have trade union rates of pay, employment protection, and sickness and holiday rights from day one of employment.
- An immediate 50% increase in the state

retirement pension, as a step towards a living pension. Reinstate the link with average earnings now.

- Reject ‘Welfare to Work’. For the right to decent benefits, education, training, or a job, without compulsion.
- Scrap the anti-trade union laws! For fighting trade unions, democratically controlled by their members. Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker’s wage.
- A maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

Public services

- No to privatisation and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). Renationalise all privatised utilities and services, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.
- Fully fund all services and run them under accountable, democratic committees that include representatives of service workers and users.
- Free, publicly run, good quality education, available to all at any age. Abolish university tuition fees now and introduce a living grant. No to academies!
- A socialist NHS to provide for everyone’s health needs – free at the point of use and under

democratic control. Kick out private contractors!

- Keep council housing publicly owned. For a massive building programme of publicly owned housing, on an environmentally sustainable basis, to provide good quality homes with low rents.

Environment

- Major research and investment into replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy and into ending the problems of early obsolescence and unrecycled waste.
- Public ownership of the energy generating industries. No to nuclear power. No to Trident.
- A democratically planned, low fare, publicly-owned transport system, as part of an overall plan against environmental pollution.

Rights

- Oppose discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age, and all other forms of prejudice.
- Repeal all laws that trample over civil liberties. For the right to protest! End police harassment.
- Defend abortion rights. For a woman’s right to choose when and whether to have children.
- For the right to asylum. No to racist immigration laws.

New workers’ party

- For a new mass workers’ party drawing together workers, young people and activists from workplace, community, environmental and anti-war campaigns, to provide a fighting, political alternative to the pro-big business parties.
- Trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party now and aid the building of a new workers’ party!

Socialism and internationalism

- No to imperialist wars and occupations. Withdraw the troops immediately from Iraq and Afghanistan!
- Tax the super-rich! For a socialist government to take into public ownership the top 150 companies and banks that dominate the British economy, and run them under democratic working-class control and management. Compensation to be paid only on the basis of proven need.
- A democratic socialist plan of production based on the interests of the overwhelming majority of people, and in a way that safeguards the environment.
- No to the bosses’ neo-liberal European Union! For a socialist Europe and a socialist world!