

Health and Social Care Bill final reading Con-Dems out to destroy NHS

Roger Shrivies

On Wednesday 7 September, Tory health minister Lansley's Health and Social Care Bill reaches its report stage and third reading in parliament. This bill is intended to be the next step in destroying the national health service (NHS) won by the struggles of working class people.

The bill takes away the government's 'duty of care', so there will be no legal obligation for it to provide a health service. Health workers and service users fear that the bill will replace the comprehensive universal system of health care with a fragmented US-style health market, an unequal postcode lottery with limited state-provided service for you and me and more for those with plenty of cash.

Building on the pro-privatisation measures of recent Labour governments, the bill gives the private sector priority to cherry-pick the areas they work in to maximise their profits. Patients could end up being asked to pay top-up fees for anything above the absolute basic services.

Private companies will even be allowed to take the new NHS commissioning groups to court if they fail to win contracts, leading to more NHS money being wasted in legal wrangles!

And NHS services and staffing are already being cut under the Con-

Dems' austerity measures. Tory 'efficiency savings' of up to 37% are expected over the next few years with tens of thousands of NHS jobs on the line.

NHS workers and patients cannot let this happen. There will be protests at Westminster on 7 September but this should be part of a wider movement.

Working class struggles won the NHS - more working class battles are needed to save it - and to resist all the attacks on public services. We need united action to defend the NHS, with organised trade union action at its centre, supported by anti-cuts campaigns and service users.

Fight these attacks and rebuild the NHS:

- Stop Lansley's Health and Social Care Bill

- No to cuts. For a publicly funded service, free at the point of use, to provide for everyone's health needs.

- End big business profiteering from the NHS! Scrap the costly Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes. No to private polyclinics and GP consortiums.

- End 'payment by results'. Take all health services and buildings back from big business and place them under public ownership. Publicly fund and integrate them with the rest of the NHS.

- Nationalise the pharmaceutical and medical supply industries and private health providers, with compensation only on the basis of proven need. Bring them under working class control and management.



The Con-Dems' NHS wrecking bill has aroused anger photo Paul Mattsson

- Abolish Foundation Trusts. For democratic control of local health services by elected health workers and community representatives as well as elected representatives from local and national government.

- End NHS job losses and low pay.

- For a new mass workers' party to fight for the NHS and against cuts and privatisation. For socialist policies and a planned economy to

end poverty, bad housing, unemployment, pollution and inequality - the biggest killers and causes of ill-health.

Demonstration from St Thomas hospital, Waterloo, London SE1, to Parliament, Wednesday 7 September. Assemble 6.30pm. Torchlight vigil outside Houses of Parliament, 9.30pm.

Fast news

Mea Culpa

US investor Warren Buffett has ruffled the feathers of his fellow billionaires by demanding they pay more taxes. In what must be an anathema to Republican Tea Party zealots, Buffett said: "My friends and I have been coddled long enough by a billionaire-friendly Congress. It's time for our government to get serious about shared sacrifice."

So far, Buffett's catharsis has fallen on stony ground as the Obama administration and Congress have not reversed president Bush's 'temporary' tax cuts (worth \$700 billion) to the wealthy but instead have slashed trillions from public services and welfare in an attempt to plug the country's giant debt. Since 1979 the top 1% of US income earners have seen their federal tax liability fall from 37% to 29%. And while the middle classes have also enjoyed a 4.3% fall in tax rates, median male real earnings have not risen since 1975. Buffett can afford to be altruistic since he certainly won't be checking down the back of the sofa for any loose change to pay the electricity bill. His motivation in demanding higher taxes for the rich probably has something to do with trying to save the capitalist system from the anger of poor workers and the dispossessed.

Exporting death

Armaments are probably the last thing people in north Africa and the Middle East need but that hasn't stopped a surge of British arms exports this year to these regions.

According to the Times, £30.5 million of arms were exported to Libya, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia between February and June 2011 (30% up on the same period in 2010) when these regimes were carrying out repression against pro-democracy opposition. These exports coincided with David Cameron's trade tour of the Middle East where he defended UK arms sales. Eight of the 20 companies accompanying Cameron were defence and aerospace firms.

Defend women's rights

The Department of Health has confirmed that it will change the law on abortion to mean that women must be offered advice from 'independent' organisations. As well as delaying the process of getting an abortion, this opens the door to 'pro-life' groups getting involved to talk women out of going ahead. Right wing Tory MP Nadine Dorries had tabled an amendment to the Health Bill to this effect but this move by the government removes even the need to have a debate in parliament on the issue! Dorries has explicitly said that she hopes the measure will cut down on the number of abortions performed each year by 60,000. But she says nothing about investment in decent homes, wages, sex education, childcare or opposition to cuts. These measures would help give women a real choice over when and whether to have children.

This development shows that the Socialist was correct in warning that the Con-Dem government would attack women's reproductive rights and highlights the need for a united trade union and community response to defend hard-won women's rights.

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'Murdochgate' places Cameron under spotlight

Sean Figg

Con-Dem prime minister David Cameron was already up to his eyes in 'Murdochgate' before the latest tranche of revelations.

Andy Coulson resigned as the editor of News of the World in January 2007 following the imprisonment of the paper's royal editor Clive Goodman for phone hacking. However it has now emerged that Coulson remained on the News International pay-roll until the end of 2007. This is being described as 'severance', but whatever the technicalities Coulson was receiving money from the Murdoch empire for nearly a year after his resignation.

This is devastating for Cameron because from July 2007, Coulson was employed by the Tory leader as his Director of Communications whose brief included 'handling the media'. Conflict of interest doesn't begin to describe it!

The latest Murdochgate revelation further corroborates what the Socialist has highlighted since the scandal first broke: the web of connections between politicians, big business and the state. It shows the undemocratic credentials of the mega-wealthy ruling class at the top of society.

There is a mock News of the World front page currently circulating on social media websites. The satirical creators have given it the headline "Murdoch regrets hiring Cameron". But this tongue in cheek comment hits the nail on the head.

The Electoral Commission has refused Labour MP Tom Watson's

demand that it investigates whether or not these payments amount to an "undeclared donation to the Conservative Party".

The details of these payments became public with the release of a letter written by Goodman to News International in March 2007 protesting his dismissal following his conviction. This letter has other devastating revelations: that the knowledge and practice of phone hacking was widespread at the News of the World; that Coulson was not only aware of what was going on but encouraged it; and that a deal was done whereby Goodman would 'carry the can' for his colleagues as the 'rogue' journalist in exchange for his old job back when he had served his prison sentence.

Potentially this destroys Cameron's reputation and makes his position as prime minister untenable. Did Coulson lie to him about phone hacking? Or did Cameron lie to us? Or both?

In the Watergate scandal in the early 1970s, US president Richard Nixon was not impeached for his role in the break-in and theft at Democrat offices, but for lying about his knowledge of it. Could the same process repeat itself? This saga has yet to play out.

What is lacking is an opposition prepared to drive the advantage home and push the Con-Dems out. Ed Miliband and his predecessors have all enjoyed the warmth of Murdoch's 'friendship'. The case for a political party based on the working class rather than sucking up to big business gangsters has never been more obvious.