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SAVE OUR NHS



PHOTOS: PAUL MATSSON

FOUNDED BY WORKING-CLASS STRUGGLE, WORKERS' ACTION NEEDED NOW TO SAVE IT

HOW WE CAN SAVE THE NHS



WHAT WE THINK

As we go to press, Rishi Sunak is trumpeting his upcoming 'big' announcement on the NHS. The idea that this out-of-touch millionaire head of a dysfunctional government and a party tearing itself apart can save the NHS is sick.

A new report by the King's Fund found that the Tories are killing the NHS. Comparing the NHS to other countries' care systems found that it had fewer key resources. The cost of decades of Tory - and New Labour - governments' underinvestment, privatisation, reorganisation and cuts is falling life expectancy, poorer health, and people's lives lost. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine found that long A&E waits contributed to 23,000 excess deaths in 2022.

The King's Fund reported that the UK compares badly in terms of physical resources and capital investment. It has 'strikingly' low levels of clinical staff, whose "remuneration... also appears to be less competitive". Greece has 6.3 doctors per 1,000 people while Britain has just three. The report also found that the pandemic hit treatment waiting times far harder in the UK than in other countries.

As a result the NHS has become synonymous with waiting lists and crisis. A return to a pre-NHS situation is posed: healthcare only for those who can afford it, and sickness, poor quality health and stunted life expectancy for the majority. The health bills bankrupting US workers and Big Pharma's opioid pandemic tell us what could lie ahead.

But the National Health Service is the biggest social reform the British working class has won so far. Health worker strikes point to what is needed to defend its existence.

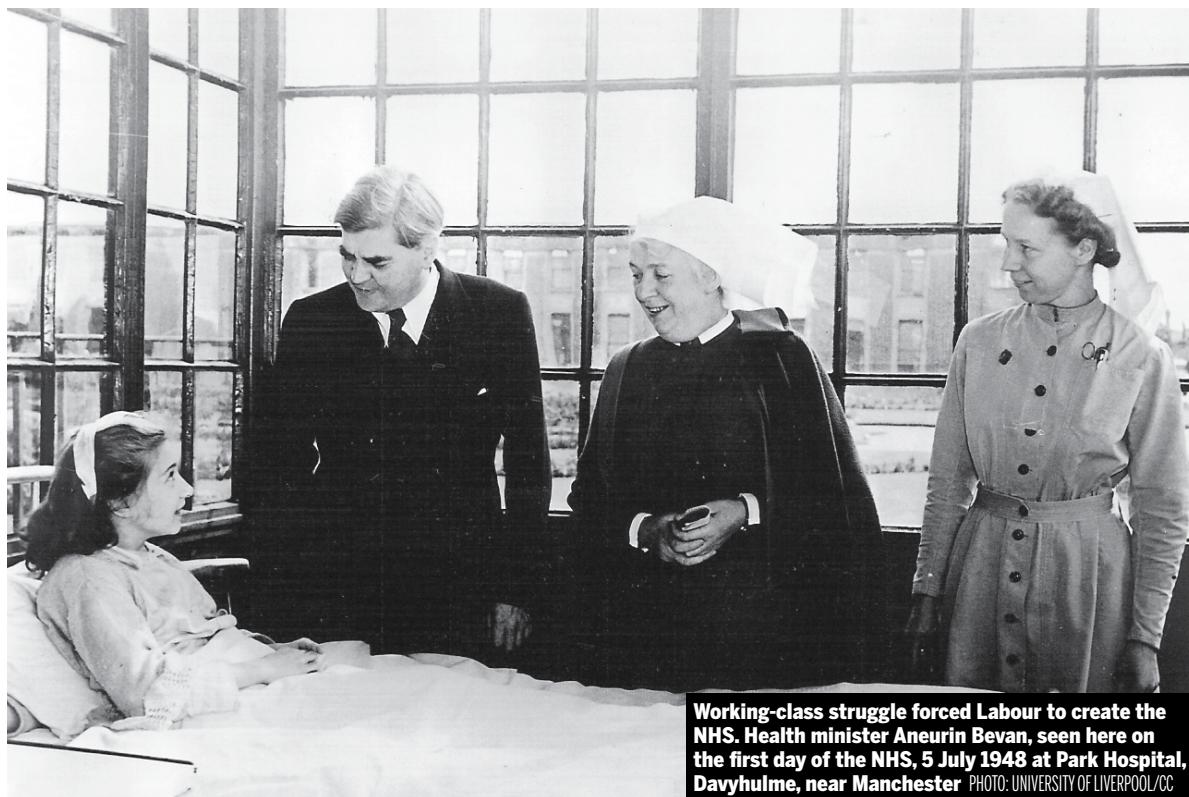
The 75th anniversary must be seized as an opportunity for discussion and debate, among campaigners, trade unionists, socialists and all defenders of the NHS, on how to organise the working-class collective action necessary to save our health service - and to rebuild it.

The NHS is a product of mass workers' struggle

War and economic crisis dominated the years preceding the foundation of the NHS in 1945, exposing the capitalist class's inability to provide the promised 'land fit for heroes'.

Huge waves of workers' struggles included the general strike in 1926. There were also international examples to inspire workers to get organised and fight back.

In the 1917 Russian revolution, the working class broke with capitalism - a system aimed primarily at realising private profit, not satisfying the needs of society or the planet. The working class in Britain gained confidence



Working-class struggle forced Labour to create the NHS. Health minister Aneurin Bevan, seen here on the first day of the NHS, 5 July 1948 at Park Hospital, Davyhulme, near Manchester. PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL/CC



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

and built the trade unions and the Labour Party.

In 1945, the working class found an expression of its unwillingness to continue paying the price for the bosses' crisis in voting Labour. Fearing the working class's appetite would grow with the eating, and workers would build a movement which could threaten their right to rule, the capitalists were forced to make concessions - including the NHS.

Alongside the founding of the NHS, council housing was built, welfare benefits were introduced, and coal, oil, gas, electricity, transport, the Bank of England and, later, iron and steel were nationalised.

But the economy and society generally were left in the hands of the capitalist class. Therefore these historic gains faced and continue to face constant attack.

Build a new workers' party to fight for NHS

The need for the working class to organise, build its own party and develop its programme for ending poverty and exploitation - key factors in ill health - is also a feature of the situation today.

From its inception up until Blairism, Labour was a contradictory party. On the one hand, Labour's leadership was not in favour of breaking with capitalism - which in the end means the working class must pay the price. But Labour's working-class base could organise to put pressure on the leadership. Socialists played a leading role in fighting for this.

Under New Labour, Labour became an out-and-out pro-bosses party. This is Keir Starmer's model too. A Labour government will not

resuscitate the NHS because Keir Starmer is determined to prove his party will act in the interests of the bosses. That means a continuation of the policies that are killing our health service.

Starmer doesn't support workers' strikes. Jeremy Corbyn's supporters and policies are being purged. Corbyn's manifesto pledges, including public ownership, raising funding and expanding "healthcare free at the point of use: free dentistry, prescriptions and car parking in NHS England", are gone.

Instead, shadow health minister Wes Streeting has said that it would not be "responsible or credible" for Labour to say it would "pour more resources in" to the NHS. Saving the NHS will require mass collective action, including the building of a workers' political alternative.

The Socialist Party campaigns for a new mass workers' party, and calls on the trade unions and Jeremy Corbyn to take steps towards its creation. The Socialist Party's participation in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is an important part of that fight. That includes standing TUSC candidates at the general election, if preparations are not made in time for a union-backed stand with more authority.

For a socialist NHS

The weaknesses that were built into the NHS, concessions to capitalism, must not be repeated. Pharmaceutical medical supply and hospital construction industries were left in private hands.

The extraction of massive profits still undermines the health service. It is necessary to fight for the nationalisation of these industries under democratic workers' control, with no compensation to the fat cats. All the profiteers must be kicked out of the NHS and care services.

The King's Fund report concludes that the inability of healthcare services to meet people's health needs is a universal phenomenon, just to varying degrees of crisis. But this is part of a general picture of capitalism's failings.

One third of the world's population do not have enough to eat. Even in the richest countries in the world, the living standards of the majority have been falling, or at best stagnating, for many years.

Ill-health is a product of all the attacks on working-class living standards - including low pay, poor housing, unhealthy food, stress, poverty, inequality, and all the ways big business pollutes and abuses our environment. The fight for the NHS is therefore inextricably linked to the fight to transform society in a socialist direction.

The Socialist Party fights for a new party to have a socialist programme to be capable of liberating humanity from poverty, inequality and exploitation. This could unite all the sections of the working class against the Tory attempts to divide us along lines of race, gender, age, etc.

Taking the top 150 companies and the banking system that dominate the British economy into public ownership under democratic working-class control and management would be a good start. This could lay the basis for establishing a democratic socialist plan for the economy, based on the interests of the billions not the billionaires, and of protecting the environment.

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How privatisation is destroying the NHS

JON DALE

SECRETARY, UNITE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
HEALTH BRANCH

Tory MPs voted against setting up the NHS in 1948, but it immediately proved so popular they were forced to accept it. It proved useful to private business in the following years of low unemployment, treating workers so they could return to work. But as the post-war economic boom ended, Tory opposition re-emerged.

In 1974, Tory MP Sir Keith Joseph (later in Margaret Thatcher's cabinet) called for an end to state involvement in 'micromanaging' the economy, including public services.

A confidential 1982 Tory memo suggested government aiming to end state provision of healthcare over an extended period, with those unable to pay for private insurance having their charges met by state rebates.

In 1985, Tory MPs Oliver Letwin and John Redwood (both later cabinet ministers) proposed moving slowly through a number of options: making the NHS an independent trust, increasing joint ventures with the private sector, extending charging, introducing a system of health credits (or vouchers), and finally moving to an insurance scheme. Letwin wrote in 1988 that such ideas are "in origin a political rather than an economic or financial act".

The Tory party has been itching for decades to get healthcare back in the private sector, so its big business backers could profit from the NHS's huge sums of public money. But, although large chunks have been privatised, most of the NHS is still publicly owned and run.

Tory ambitions have not been fully realised because of the enormous opposition they run into. Threats to close hospitals or community health services are so unpopular that even local Tory MPs, supporting cuts and privatisation, are pushed to oppose the plans - often trying to shift the axe elsewhere.

Tory governments from 1979-97 moved towards their goal, in particular by introducing the 'market' into the NHS. This began turning health care into a commodity to be bought and sold, instead of a public service

to meet need.

Faster travel down this route came with Tony Blair's New Labour government. Foundation Trusts, billions of pounds of PFI debt, Independent Sector Treatment Centres, and other roads opened up, funneling public money into private coffers.

Profit-making healthcare providers spread still further under the Tory-Lib Dem coalition and Tory governments since. Private providers delivered just 0.02% of all NHS-funded non-emergency treatment in 2003-04, but 5.2% in 2020-21.

This figure would be much higher if it included mental health services, care of the elderly and adults with learning disabilities, dentistry and many other areas of healthcare now mostly run for profit.

Spending on non-NHS providers has increased 70% since 2012-13 - from £10.8 billion to £18.3 billion after adjusting for inflation - while total planned Department of Health day-to-day spending increased just 42%.

How much further can privatisation go before the NHS stops providing healthcare directly, instead awarding contracts to profit-seeking companies to provide services?

A big problem for privatising

zealots is that healthcare can be very expensive to provide - private companies like to cherry-pick. Simple operations like eye cataracts can be performed relatively cheaply without needing overnight stays. In 2016, 11% of NHS cataract procedures in England were delivered by private companies. Five years later that had grown to 46%.

200 specialist eye doctors signed a letter warning that "the accelerating shift towards independent sector provision of cataract surgery" is having a "destabilising impact" on safe provision. The loss of training opportunities for junior doctors and loss of trained staff to the private sector risks future treatment of complex eye conditions the private sector is not interested in.

On 20 June the government announced the award of a £25 million contract to US data firm, Palantir, now in pole position to win a £480 million contract running the new NHS Federated Data Platform. It paid £1 for its first NHS contract, awarded by ex-health secretary Matt Hancock during the pandemic without having to tender.

Palantir's billionaire founder and chair, Peter Thiel, donated \$1.25 million to Trump's election campaign. Earlier this year he said the NHS "makes people sick" and it needs "market mechanisms" to fix it.

Controlling all the health information currently held by the NHS, including GP and social care records, potentially gives the company a priceless resource. Palantir, set up with CIA money and with military contracts, uses FTI Consulting to lobby the UK government for its interests.

A member of Labour's National Executive, Abdi Duale, is an FTI



director, as is Gemma Doyle. She is also a director of Progressive Britain, the right-wing Labour group with shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting on its Advisory Panel.

It's clear whose interests a Labour government will be 'progressing' - and it won't be patients, health workers and all those wanting a publicly owned, fully financed and democratically run NHS. A new mass workers' party with a socialist programme must be built if the NHS is to be saved.

1 to 43k

While only one person in England waited longer than 12 hours to be seen in A&E in August 2010, by October 2022 more than 43,000 people suffered a 12 hour wait



Come to a Socialist Party meeting near you

The Socialist Party has regular meetings in towns and cities across the country including public meetings to mark the anniversary of the NHS. If you would like to participate:

- Go to socialistparty.org.uk
- Or text 07761 818206 with your name and postcode

Kick out the privatisers! PHOTO: MARY FINCH

How we saved Glenfield children's heart unit

STEVE SCORE

FORMER CHAIR OF SAVE GLENFIELD CHILDREN'S HEART CENTRE CAMPAIGN

In the summer of 2016 NHS England (NHSE), and behind it the Tory government, threatened the existence of three of the eleven congenital heart centres across the country. One of those was at the Glenfield Hospital in Leicester - the only hospital in the whole of the East Midlands that carried out operations on children's hearts. These include babies whose hearts are no bigger than a walnut. It was literally a life-and-death struggle.

18 months later NHSE announced a climbdown in the case of two of those where there had been campaigns to oppose closure.

As a father of a son who had heart surgery there, I had a personal stake, but was able to use the experience and campaigning methods of the Socialist Party to build, alongside many others, a huge campaign.

We organised an initial small public meeting, but through it got contact with other families, trade unionists and NHS campaigners. At it, we proposed the establishment of a broad campaign that included families,

campaigners, staff and, importantly, the trade union movement. The first public meeting of the Save Glenfield Children's Heart Centre campaign had 150 at it.

Over 18 months we held demonstrations of up to 2,000 people at a time, mass meetings and lobbies. 130,000 signed a petition and 7,500 engaged in NHS England's complex online consultation. We organised a series of public meetings across the region to go through these arguments in detail.

We got backing from a series of local and regional trade union bodies. We even had Len McCluskey, then leader of Unite the Union, speak at one of the demos. After the campaign we broadened it out to 'Save Our NHS Leicestershire', to keep the fight going on wider issues.

Alongside other successful campaigns it proves if you fight you can win!



Huge march through Leicester in 2017 PHOTO: LEICESTER SP



Barts strike victory against privatisation



Bart's strikers in 2022 PHOTO: ISAI MARJERLA

LEN HOCKEY

BART'S UNITE BRANCH SECRETARY

“Who's got the power? We got the power! What kind of power? Union power!”

These were the words often chanted by Bart's health workers in east London in an historic win that secured our return to direct NHS employment, with increases in pay and conditions, and the departure of out-sourcer Serco.

Porters, cleaners, back-of-house catering staff, security and reception staff walked out for two weeks of action at the beginning of 2022. The action by 600 Unite members across three hospitals - Royal London, St Bartholomew's and Whipps

Cross - followed a paltry offer from Serco Bart's, and then the announcement by Serco that it was serving notice to quit the contract, leaving it 18 months early on 30 April 2023.

The inspiring action by the overwhelmingly migrant workforce included daily mass picket lines of up to 180-strong, singing, dancing, and marches to each other's hospitals and rallies.

The victory has seen the return in-house of each service, starting with security and reception in November 2022, porters in February 2023, and lastly cleaners and caterers on 1 May 2023. In all, over 1,700 workers across five hospital sites in the second biggest trust in England have returned to direct trust employment as a result of the magnificent, united action of these strikers.

Fight for a future for NHS workers

CHARLIE KENNEDY

ICU NURSE IN THE NHS

It is the 75th birthday of the NHS, but it is closer to disappearing into history than ever before.

Throughout my time in healthcare I have learnt a lot about the struggles of the NHS. The NHS workforce projections for 2022 predicted a 38,000 shortage of nurses alone. The British Medical Association states that we need 46,000 doctors just to be at the average number of doctors per 1,000 inhabitants among developed European countries.

We are seeing the standards of care continue to fall as funding is cut short and staff are under pressure, with higher and higher patient workloads. By December 2022, A&E

waiting times had skyrocketed to at least four hours for 50% of people. The NHS is in crisis, and the only way to address this is to organise for substantive change.

Nursing and medical education needs to be free of charge, and living costs should be supported with a fair and inflation-adjusted bursary. This will encourage more workers to train for NHS jobs and help solve the staffing crisis.

The pay for NHS workers needs to be increased to at least match inflation rates and previous loss of pay. By doing so, we will retain more NHS staff as well as encourage new professionals to train up. The pension system needs to be updated to provide more security in the long term for NHS workers and ensure that

workers are not left behind after they retire.

A focus needs to be placed on improving GP services by offering incentives for doctors to train in family care and creating more nationalised practices rather than wholly relying on privately funded practices.

And, importantly, the funding for NHS trusts needs to have a large overhaul, focused on giving hospitals the equipment and resources they need to run effective and safe services, under democratic control.

Neither the Tories nor Starmer's Labour Party are offering policies to save the NHS. The only way to secure a lasting future is to fight for socialist change, and that includes the building of a new mass workers' party as part of that struggle.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

