HEALTH CAMPAIGNS TOGETHER

KEEP OUR NHS PUBLIC

AUTUMN 2024

FREE

END OUTSOURCING: FAIR DEAL FOR NHS WORKERS

Strikes over outsourcing proposals affecting close to a thousand NHS workers in Suffolk and Essex are an important test case for the government. Will they keep their promise of 'delivering a new deal for working people' within the first 100 days of office and roll back outsourcing across the public sector?

The Labour Party has promised it 'will learn the lessons from the collapse of Carillion and bring about the biggest wave of insourcing of public services in a generation.' But how then will this commitment to insourcing play out for the current dispute?

Staff at East Suffolk and North Essex Foundation Trust (ESNEFT, which manages services including Colchester and Ipswich hospitals) have begun strike action against plans to outsource hundreds of jobs in facilities management (cleaning, catering, porters). However, the Trust is pushing ahead with its proposals despite a laughably poor business case and the detrimental impact on pay, conditions and morale these plans will mean.

The ESNEFT outsourcing proposal also comes at a time when organisations across the NHS are bringing services back in house, not contracting them out. In the last few years support staff have been brought back in-

house at Great Ormond Street Hospital, Imperial College Healthcare in North West London, Epsom & St Helier University Hospitals Trust in South West London, Barts Health in North East London and North Middlesex University Hospital.

Labour's new deal for working people is clear: 'Labour will end the presumption in favour of outsourcing and oversee the biggest wave of insourcing of public services for a generation [and] will also examine public services that have been outsourced as part of our drive to improve quality… We will also reinstate and strengthen the last Labour Government's two-tier code to end unfair two-tiered workforces.' So, the Government must act now and intervene on the side of the NHS workers in this dispute.

This is an opportunity for new ministers to show that the fair deal employment policies will be made real.

It is also an important test case. Will health ministers take the opportunity to show that Labour's 'new deal for working people' is for NHS staff too?

We call on the Government to stand by NHS workers and prove their commitment to a public NHS by driving out the private sector.

The strikes in Suffolk and Essex should be the last time any NHS service of this kind is considered for outsourcing. Guarantees must be given to all the workers currently threatened with the inevitably worse pay and conditions.

Find out more about the ESNEFT strikes on page 4.

FUND THE NHS

NO TO AUSTERITY 2.0

'I'll have to turn to the country and make big asks of you as well. To accept short term pain for long term good. The difficult trade-off for the genuine solution'.
Keir Starmer, 2024

George Osborne expressed a similar view and is now considered by some to be in contention for the award of 'worst chancellor ever' for his austerity policies.

Chris Mullin, writing in Prospect Magazine said:

'The present crises in health, education and care of the elderly, the decline of most non-statutory local services, stalling life expectancy, and a rise in recorded violent crime all have their roots in his disastrous - and ultimately unsuccessful - attempt to play down the deficit.'

The Prime Minister's speech on 27 August tells us, however, that the austerity story remains the dominant political narrative, despite a new Labour Government with a massive majority elected on the basis of a promise of 'change'.

In responding to Keir Starmer's bleak assessment of where Britain is today, Sharon Graham, leader of Unite, commented: 'Britain is in crisis, yes. But to say there is no money to rebuild our industry and infrastructure, or to restore our public services, is simply not true. The top 50 families have more wealth than half our population. The profit margins of the average British firm have rocketed by 30% since before the pandemic. If we taxed 1% on the wealthiest 1%, the so-called black hole would be gone'.

She previously put it to chancellor Rachel Reeves: '[People] haven't got time to wait for growth... you're going to have to borrow to invest. You haven't got time to wait for growth. People are literally hurting out there…and our crumbling public services need money.'

Early this year, a new report showed that one million people lived shorter lives than they should from 2011 to the start of the Covid pandemic. This prompted Sir Michael Marmot (director of UCL's Institute of Health Equity) to comment:

'Our country has become poor and unhealthy, where a few rich, healthy people live. People care about their health, but it is deteriorating, with their lives shortening, through no fault of their own. Political leaders can choose to prioritise everyone's health, or not. Currently they are not.'

Labour pledged in its manifesto: 'We must take preventative public health measures to tackle the biggest killers and support people to live longer, healthier lives…. Labour will stop the chaos in our health and care services, turn the page, and reform them in line with the principles of the NHS that Labour founded.'

The plan now appears to be to stick to the Tories' grim commitment to austerity for most of us, while allowing the super-rich and corporations to get even richer in the hopes that this will create economic growth – a plan incompatible with delivering on manifesto and election promises to fix a "broken" NHS.

The NHS is Labour's boldest creation. In its last period in office it was Labour that committed to raising NHS spending levels to match European averages, making the NHS one of the best healthcare providers in the world.

Now is the time for the same boldness, from the NHS to social care, transport, and education. These are the building blocks we require to make us a more equal and cohesive society.

We need to invest and now is not the time for more failed and dangerous austerity policies.

HEALTH CAMPAIGNS
TOGETHER
Affiliate your union branch to Health Campaigns Together: healthcampaignstogether.com/joinus.php

Join us today!
Be part of the campaign to save our NHS from privatisation and outsourcing.

KEEP OUR NHS PUBLIC
Join Keep Our NHS Public: keepournhspublic.com/support-page/#join

Labour's plans for the NHS are a cause for concern

Labour has made some positive commitments to the NHS, but these fall far short of a restoration of the service based on its founding principles.

It is a major worry that Labour fails to acknowledge deteriorating quality of care relates to underfunding. Current talk of 'black holes' in finances, together with arbitrary and self-imposed fiscal rules point to a new period of austerity. The inevitable cuts to public services and welfare payments are not the change that people voted for.

Examining influences on Labour thinking is revealing if not reassuring. Lord Prem Sikka describes the election victory as built on corporate patronage, while Rachel Reeves told business chiefs their fingerprints were all over the Labour manifesto.

The Health Secretary, Wes Streeting, believes that the private sector has spare capacity and is there to help despite evidence to the contrary. He is enthusiastic that innovation and technology could be an answer to the problems of the NHS, though this lacks evidence.

Significantly, Patricia Hewitt (one of Streeting's mentors), interpreted his claim that the NHS is broken as meaning the model of care is broken, requiring a change to the funding model. Streeting plans to prescribe 'treatment' on the basis of Lord Darzi delivering a diagnosis for the ills of the service. We must demand this be 'evidence based'.

Alan Milburn has once again emerged as a powerful voice on health policy. As Health Secretary under Blair, he argued against the founding model of the NHS, extended the scope of outsourcing and sought to establish a market in health care.

Milburn promoted the Private Finance Initiative on the unfounded basis it would offer savings and deliver value for money. His 'concordat' with the private health sector saw the NHS referring straightforward patients for treatment. This was followed by outsourcing of diagnostics and then Independent Sector Treatment Centres (ISTC).

An investigation by a House of Commons Health Select Committee found that ISTC didn't meet their goals. On the whole, claims that it would boost capacity for non-urgent care, shorten waiting times, expand patient choice, promote best practices and innovation, and drive NHS reform through competition weren't realised. ISTC did, however, succeed in embedding a number of private companies within the NHS, which remain today.

Rather than learning from these experiences, Streeting seems bent on repeating past mistakes. Labour should now show real courage and follow the examples of Attlee and Bevan, who built the NHS despite an economy ravaged by war. This is not the time to listen to corporate interests or those who wasted millions trying to turn the NHS into a market.

NHS staff say in-house is best

Ancillary workers represented by UNISON at Colchester, Aldeburgh, Harwich and Ipswich hospitals have walked out over their trust's plans to outsource their jobs.

After a successful five-day strike from 19 August, UNISON members will again walk out for five days starting on 10 September.

Workers fear that if their jobs are outsourced, their pay and conditions would get worse and patient safety would be impacted.

Facilities workers at Ipswich hospital have already been outsourced to OCS and receive less sick pay than their colleagues in Colchester currently employed by the NHS. The current OCS contract is set to run out in April.

UNISON is calling for all ancillary workers to be brought in-house and be employed by the NHS.

Picket lines have been met with enthusiasm from the local community. Workers from CWU, Unite and Unite Community, have also joined UNISON members on the picket line.

The trust has brought in OCS staff from Hull, Manchester and Newcastle to break the strike, and has even called on admin staff to clean wards to fill in for the striking workers.

John Franklin, who works as a porter at Colchester hospital told Keep Our NHS Public in July:

'Staff give their hearts and souls into working for the NHS... we will not accept being sold off like a piece of equipment to a private company so they can make money and the ESNEFT trust can fool themselves into believing that this will be better value for money or improve services. Staff know that this is simply not the truth and with OCS... currently at an overspend of £13 million, this just proves that the trust have not considered the issue of privatisation properly. Staff will continue to fight for their jobs... and for the best service possible, and that is in-house!'

It is time for all NHS staff and services to be brought back in-house. This would result in less funds going to the private sector, better pay and conditions for staff, and greater accountability for trusts.

Go to eastern.unison.org.uk for more information about the ESNEFT strike, and follow @unisoneastern on X/Twitter to stay up to date.

RESTORE THE PEOPLE'S NHS

The model of an NHS, publicly owned, provided, and accountable has frequently been ranked one of the best health care systems in the world. It works. It's not the model that is broken, it is governments that have failed the NHS.

We believe the NHS founding principles are sound, but steady privatisation and defunding have led to the worst crisis and worst performance in its history.

We must change course before the service collapses completely. That's why we're calling for a restoration of a 'People's NHS'.

SIGN UP HERE
Keep Our NHS Public Mailing list

Find out more at keepournhspublic.com/peoplesnhs/

NHS EVENTS
@ Labour Party Conference

AUSTERITY IS A POLITICAL CHOICE: TAX THE RICH
PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY AGAINST AUSTERITY
12:00 - Sun 22 September - Outside ACC, Kings Dock, Liverpool, L3 4FP

HOW THE MARKET DAMAGES PUBLIC SERVICES
SOCIALIST HEALTH ASSOCIATION & SOCIALIST EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
18:30 - Tues 24 September - Quaker Meeting House, Liverpool, L1 3BT