

# The fight against the break-up of the National Health Service

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Today health workers and the local community will demonstrate their support for the National Health Service (NHS) on its 65th anniversary, at its birthplace at Trafford General hospital in Greater Manchester, England. Those attending are also protesting the downgrading of Trafford's A&E unit and the withdrawal of intensive care, acute surgery and children's services.

The defeat of these cuts and the broader assault on the NHS cannot be achieved on the basis of pleas and entreaties to the government, as advocated by the organisers of today's event, Save Trafford General.

It should not be necessary to make this point, given the record of the Conservative/Liberal government. The introduction in April 2012 of the Health and Social Care Act (HSC Act) has overturned the foundations of the universal health care system. From being free at the point of use, a US-style health market is being introduced where provision will be increasingly determined by ability to pay. The dismantling of public health care is being accelerated by the imposition of £20 billion in cuts to the NHS budget by 2015—a fifth of its annual expenditure.

Save Trafford General provides a platform for representatives of every political persuasion, including the Tories, Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party, to make worthless pledges of support while their parties pursue policies at a national level that attack the foundations of the NHS.

The claim that the government is open to pressure has been used to provide a veneer of opposition to the Labour Party and trade unions, who have isolated and stifled every manifestation of resistance.

Local Labour MPs Kate Green and Paul Goggins have in fact endorsed the closure plans, providing only that the money be re-invested in the ambulance service

and Wythenshawe A&E, a service 10 miles away which is already oversubscribed.

Today's event makes no effort to mobilise political opposition to the government and its wider austerity programme. People have been asked to simply link arms around the hospital and to join in a Party in the Park for the NHS, following a brief march.

Since the plans to axe the A&E unit were first announced, Save Trafford General has confined all opposition to official channels, working within the framework of the bogus "consultation" process. At its conclusion, a petition of 12,500 local people against the closure plans was handed in to 10 Downing Street, with Chair Matthew Finnegan calling for Prime Minister David Cameron to "stand up for local democracy".

When this fell flat and the closure plans were approved by Greater Manchester NHS earlier this year, it promoted the decision by Tory and Labour councillors to refer the matter to the Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, as supposedly a means to prevent the closure plans being implemented. Hunt had already ruled out beforehand any prospect of overturning the decision.

Hunt, who co-authored a book describing the NHS as a "60 year old mistake," is due to make an announcement on the closure plans in the next days. This week Save Trafford General appealed to him, yet again.

Save Trafford General has hailed the decision by the Unite trade union, Britain's largest, to participate in today's event as a boost to the campaign. Yet the union, with 100,000 members within the health service, has not lifted a finger to oppose the closure plans at Trafford General. Rather, Unite's web site, advertising a number of token events across the country to coincide within the 65th anniversary, describes its attendance at

Trafford General as a “photo opportunity.”

The pretence of solidarity with Trafford General by Unison is a fraud. It has co-operated with the closure plans from day one. Unison Staff Side Lead Margaret Roberts worked with the panel overseeing the cuts at Trafford General, stating in January the union was “closely involved since the proposals were first discussed.” She proclaimed “the process as open and transparent and that the Trade Unions were and remain committed to the proposals.”

Meanwhile, the coalition without an electoral mandate, has been able to ram through its plans for outright privatisation. This is under conditions in which a quarter of MPs and members of the House of Lords have financial interests in private health care companies—including Tory, Liberal Democrat and Labour representatives.

Denials that this legislation meant outright privatisation have been disproven by amendments to Section 75 to the HSC Act 2012, which became law in April this year. The regulations governs how health services will be commissioned by the Clinical Commissioning Groups, which have taken over two thirds of the NHS budget. The regulations enforced a compulsory element in the tendering out NHS services to the private sector.

“The NHS is expected to put around £20 billion of contracts out to tender in the next few years amid an escalation of private sector involvement in hospitals, GP surgeries and community health services,” the *Financial Times* noted.

Trafford General’s A&E unit is one of over 30 being closed nationally. There has been no action by the unions to unify opposition to these cuts. Their call for the government to intervene, on a case by case basis, has enabled the opposition to be fragmented, isolated and defeated.

It was the last Labour government which closed Trafford General’s maternity unit in 2010 as part of the largest restructuring program to date of hospital services across Greater Manchester, with the number of maternity units reduced from 12 to 8.

Trafford General was also the site of one of Labour’s Independent Sector Treatment Centres, in which, for the first time, private companies were permitted to perform NHS funded operations. A 2011 report estimated that £252 million was paid to private

companies for operations that were never performed. Netcare at Trafford General was the worst offender, receiving £35.1 million for treatment not provided.

The defence of health care as a basic social right cannot be taken forward within the framework of the capitalist system. The dismantling of the NHS is at the centre of an unprecedented austerity programme, aimed at reversing all the social gains made by the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party has initiated the NHS FightBack campaign, based upon the independent political mobilisation of the working class. The campaign insists:

“The defence of health care and every other basic social right can be taken forward only through a break from the unions and the Labour Party. Action committees must be formed by patients, hospital staff and the workers and youth whose lives and health are being jeopardised. The problem is not a lack of funds or resources, but the monopoly of wealth by the super-rich. This monopoly can be broken only by a mass movement of the working class to bring down the coalition government and replace it by a workers’ government based on socialist policies.”



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