

# UK junior doctors denounce attack on wages, working conditions

**Our reporters**  
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*World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to junior doctors on picket lines and at rallies during this week's two one-day strikes without emergency cover.

Niraj is a junior doctor working at Charing Cross Hospital in west London. He said the Conservative government was trying to destroy working conditions: "They cut the research time available to doctors studying fundamental medicine, which has vital applications into real surgical operations in cardiac surgery or neurosurgery. This hospital is one of the main centres in neurosurgery in the UK."

On the government claim that it will introduce a seven-day health service, Niraj said, "We doctors are made to work already 24 hours in a team from 8 a.m. to the next morning 8 a.m. If an emergency happens or a severe case develops with a patient, we remain at work out of professional care for the patient."

The contract the government plans to impose in August means "an effective pay cut of around 30 to 40 percent," he said. "All our unsocial hours bonuses will be wiped out. I carry £60,000 student loan debt under my name to finance my studies to become a consultant doctor, spanning 11 years overall from the start, with my university degree. A general practitioner needs 5 years of study. Younger junior doctors have had to accumulate higher level of debts to fund both their studies and their yearly maintenance. What was £60,000 in student loans now turns into £100,000 in loans for the younger junior doctors."

"The government wants to decimate our pay, with the consequences that we as doctors will not be able to afford housing for ourselves and our families."

"It should never have come to this, but we must take a stand. No one is going to do it for us. We stand against the privatisation of the National Health Service."

Following the first strike day on Tuesday, hundreds of junior doctors and their supporters attended a demonstration after marching from St. Thomas' Hospital to the Department of Health, via the residence of the prime minister, Downing Street.

Mike, who works at Guys Hospital in the capital alongside 300 others, was critical of the role of the trade unions and the Labour Party, who have been instrumental in laying the basis for the attacks on the NHS now being enforced by the Tories. He said, "The unions and the British Medical Association [junior doctors' trade union] were inadequate at defending the National Health Service, particularly since the new health care act of 2012."

"The new Labour Party had been attacking and undermining the NHS since Tony Blair. As for the old Labour Party, I think it is gone for good."

Mike said, "I will look up and read the website of the NHS FightBack."

Reporters explained to Mike about the call of the Socialist Equality Party and NHS FightBack for junior doctors to establish action committees, independent of the BMA.

Stacey is from Glasgow and works as a junior doctor in a north west London hospital with 250 others. She attended the rally with friends and brought a homemade banner reading, "People over profit." She said, "The cuts, the increased workload and hours will simply put both patients and doctors in mortal danger of making a mistake."

On Wednesday, a rally of around 1,000 health workers and supporters was held in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, outside City Hall.

Angela, a junior doctor, was asked her reaction to the attempt by the Labour Party and BMA to have the government's proposed contract introduced as a pilot

scheme. The health unions worked unsuccessfully with the Labour Party over the weekend to engineer a return to work and the introduction of the inferior contract via a pilot scheme.

Angela said, “I can’t understand why it is even mentioned. I heard [Health Secretary Jeremy] Hunt had rejected it, but that may just be a ploy. He could be saying: ‘Come on and convince me.’ It is a bad, a very bad compromise that allows Hunt to probably get his way through the back door. We are asked to put our trust in the results of a scheme without knowing who the people testing it are within the NHS.”

Asked what she thought about the growing level of public support for their struggle, in contrast to the role of the unions, who were organising nothing in their defence, Angela said, “The support from the staff we work with is fantastic and also from the public, but we can’t win on sympathy and good wishes. Many of the staff are aware that if we are beaten the nurses will be next. You cannot impose the contract just on the junior doctors. We are told the other unions have their hands tied by the [anti-union] laws. I don’t know how to deal with that, but we should be defending the NHS together. It’s everyone’s fight.”

James, a medical student studying at the University of Sheffield, said, “What the contract says isn’t the biggest issue. I think it’s more to do with the fact there is no respect from the government for what doctors do. Otherwise they wouldn’t have to strike.”

“Talk of a 24-hour NHS is a sham, as there is a 24-hour service already. It can’t run without nurses and the other staff members.”

Althea is a junior doctor at Salford Royal Hospital in the north west of England. She said, “I am from the Philippines where this is no free health system. If you can’t pay, you don’t get any treatment, and if you are very ill you die.

“I think this is a struggle for all of the public sector. Everyone is under threat. Hunt’s proposals do not make sense, as we already work at weekends. We work over and above our rota hours on a goodwill basis. I have just finished an 80-hour week.

“Much of the NHS is now privatised. We are already understaffed. We get a rota, and there is always a shortfall in staff—and the infrastructure is all collapsing. We have the support of the public and the other sections in the NHS. We want the government to talk

with us, but they are refusing.”

Outside Bristol Royal Infirmary in south west England, 250 junior doctors staged a silent sit-in protest. Members of the public showed their support for the strike by bringing hot drinks and food to the picket line.

Later 350 to 400 junior doctors and their supporters marched through the city.



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