

# UK: Protesters at Leeds demonstration denounce attacks on National Health Service

Our reporters  
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Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* and the NHS FightBack campaign interviewed some of those protesting in defence of the National Health Service (NHS) in Leeds Saturday.

Stephanie Smith, who works for Leeds City Health Care explained, “We are an acute rehab in-patient facility and we like to send patients home for ongoing rehab so they can have more independence. But the Community Teams are so full they have not got capacity, so we have to keep people in hospital unnecessarily.

“I have worked here for seven years and never known things like this. In the past, our patients were nearly always taken on by a community rehab team. The government are arranging to demolish social care. They are moving to a situation where there are no adult social care staff in Leeds, as these will go out to private tender. The NHS in Leeds is not taking patients on because they are not getting the money. Without back up in Community Services they can’t discharge. The government have known about this for four years and not done anything about it. They don’t want an NHS, it’s never been a priority.”

Stephanie’s colleague said, “A lot of the managers have got interests in private insurance companies. Oliver Letwin [a Conservative MP] said that if the Tories get in the NHS will be gone in 10 years and [Conservative Health Secretary] Jeremy Hunt wrote a book on how to privatise the NHS and is blaming the NHS [for problems brought about because of austerity cuts].

“Money goes into paying a tier of management and consultants who don’t do anything other than rob the taxpayer. [Virgin conglomerate founder] Richard Branson is the devil incarnate, he sent his kids to medical school so they could help him privatise health care.

“I also think it’s shocking how they have pulled the funding for nurse training. I’m an occupational therapist and the funding for training will mean that nurses will be

£60,000 to £80,000 in debt, starting on a wage of £20,000 a year. Why would anyone go into this job with these levels of debt? During training these student nurses are working on the wards. It’s modern day slavery as they won’t get a bursary.”

Describing the spread of NHS privatisation, Stephanie explained, “In Leeds all the rehab beds are rented from private companies and they have recently served notice on the contracts. The tenders are up for grabs so there will be more privatisation on the way.”

Nicola works at the Royal Marsden Hospital in London. She said, “The government are trying to force privatisation. The latest attack announced this week where many items will not be available on prescription is another aspect of running things down. Coeliacs will no longer be able to get gluten free food. Suddenly people will turn up at their doctor’s surgeries and will have to pay.

“The consultant plans that are part of STPs pay the consultant management who specialise in wasting money on sham consultations. Things are being imposed top-down like the STPs [Sustainable Transformation Plans] and UHC [United Health Care], which is the biggest private health care company. UHC created the template for the STPs.

“NHS England is an unaccountable body and everything is decided behind closed doors. [Chief Executive] Simon Stevens who currently runs it was appointed by Jeremy Hunt. UHC is like a subsidiary of the NHS, gobbling up all the contracts.”

Nikki, a first-year medical student at Leeds University, attended the NHS demonstration with a friend. She said, “I am completely opposed to the cuts in the NHS being imposed by the government. If I am honest, I don’t think most first- and second-year medical students understand the seriousness of the situation.

“At the moment I am in a general medical ward. I am

shadowing members of staff there and I sometimes find it difficult to watch. The staff are under so much pressure. You can see it in their faces as they rush around. They have so much work to do, to care for the patients under really difficult conditions.

“Sometimes patients are accommodated in the corridors, not just for a couple of hours, but permanently. Believe me, they are being well cared for, but the pressure on the staff is enormous. Patients have no privacy, which is quite sad to watch as the staff are doing their very best to help them.

“The junior doctors often talk about the situation. They say that their colleagues have gone abroad to find work, where they expect to find better conditions.

“These cuts go against everything that doctors set out to do. I decided to become a doctor because I wanted to help people. I grew up in Zimbabwe and spent a lot of time with my father. He is a doctor in Zimbabwe and does a lot of out-reach work, in rural communities. I was exposed to him helping people and it sparked something inside of me.”

Marjorie Miles, a pensioner said, “I will be 90 next week and the NHS has been so important in my lifetime. It didn’t start until I was married. I was in the Women’s Land Army, and when I came out after the war, the hospitals were full. We thought, what is going to happen? We fought for the National Health Service, which then came about in 1947.

“Now, I’m being refused treatment. They don’t say so openly, but it’s because of my age. It’s a good excuse. If you’ve got the money to pay, you can get treated.

“I don’t want to see the end of something that was so good. We don’t get many things that help everybody. Because the population is increasing, we obviously need more money spending on the NHS.”

Jim Twiss is part of the Support Stafford Hospital campaign and attended with his friend, Rich Duffy. Jim said, “We’ve come to support the fight against the cuts in the NHS. In Stafford, our hospital has been downgraded from having 24 hours a day A&E [accident and emergency] cover for the last three years. We were promised before the last general election that we could get it back, but nothing has happened.

“It means that people have to be ferried up to Stoke on Trent, which is half an hour’s drive. With the roads as they are, there’s always traffic jams and pile-ups. There have been women going up to Stoke to have babies, and they’ve had to have them on the side of the M6 motorway or in lay-bys on the A34.

“We’ve had enough of it, and we need something done about it. It’s purely to cut back on services so that everyone will go privately. It’s easy to see, and we don’t think that is acceptable.”

Frank Slater, from the Fighting 4 Grantham Hospital campaign, said, “We have to stop these plans for the National Health Service, the STPs. They are totally over-engineered and aren’t going to work, it’s just a case of more privatisation of the health service.

“I feel really strongly about this, as a retired nurse myself. I owe a lot to the NHS, both in terms of my career and my own health, as I’m older now. I’m actually the same age as the NHS and I hope we both last!

“In Grantham, the issue is the night-time closure of the Accident & Emergency Department, which has been closed overnight since last August. The United Lincolnshire Health Trust has promised to reopen it, but it’s still closed. It’s all part of the STP plan. I think there are eventually 26 A&E departments to be closed throughout the country, all part of the cuts.

“I fear for lives, and I fear for our health.

“It’s all to save money. They’re particularly blaming my age group, the elderly. The Tory government want to privatise the whole of the NHS. They’re pillaging the NHS, the private companies are raiding its funds.”

WSWS campaigners spoke to protesters about the campaign to demand the release of 13 Indian Maruti Suzuki workers in India, who have been framed-up and jailed for life. Their imprisonment is the outcome of a brutal campaign by the Suzuki Corporation, the Indian government and police with the full support of India’s major political parties.

The WSWS team distributed hundreds of leaflets about the campaign. Many at the protest expressed concern about the fate of the Maruti Suzuki workers, stating they would sign the online petition demanding their release.

Mohammad Arshad Khatana is the chairman of the Leeds Council of Mosques. He said, “It is very, very unfair. It is disgusting, these people need to be freed as soon as possible.”

*For further information visit [NHS FightBack](http://NHSFightBack.org).*



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