

Manchester demonstrators: “People are dying under these austerity measures.”

Our reporters
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Paul and **Sarah** attended the People’s Assembly protest from east London, along with around 40 other workers.

Paul said, “We are newly qualified nurses. During our training over the last three years, we have been to various wards across London so we have seen the devastation that has occurred because of the cuts and privatisation.

“We are here today because we want the Tories out. They want an American-style health system and what they can’t privatise, they’ll cut.”

Paul had worked at Bart’s hospital, “which has a huge Private Finance Initiative (PFI) debt—it’s the most expensive hospital project in the history of PFI. To pay the increased debt they cut back on the nurses and its caused all sorts of problems. It means ultimately that our patients are in danger, their food is getting cold, and their medication is not getting to them on time. It’s demoralising and so consequently it’s no wonder that we need so many nurses.

“We are starting out on a new career, but all we see is constant heartache. We work with mental health patients and if anything they are suffering even more.”

Paul agreed with WSWs reporters that the Labour Party was instrumental in pushing through privatisation in the health service when in power from 1997-2010. He said, “During the Blair years, what [ex Tory Prime Minister John] Major started with the market in the health services and then with the PFI’s, Blair and Brown continued.”

Sarah said, “What we are seeing with all the austerity measures is that people’s lives are not being valued. Look at Grenfell, the fact that fireproof cladding would have cost just a bit more money but they couldn’t be bothered. It’s what we’re seeing within all structures of society. In education, teachers cannot look after all

the children. I inspected a school and it had no playground for a primary school.

“People are dying under these austerity measures. From the nursing perspective, we’re seeing not enough nurses on our wards. This is ultimately leading to poor care and patients possibly deteriorating and dying. I’ve seen instances such as when a nurse collapsed in the toilet from exhaustion. We’ve had some night shifts where there are not enough nurses on the wards.”

Brandon, from Manchester, pointed to the sign he was holding, explaining he was marching “for the many disabled people, not the few millionaires.”

“Myself and my mother have suffered from the disability cuts of the Tory party. It’s unacceptable to see the alarming number of deaths as a result of those cuts.”

Brandon explained about a young man, David Clapson, “who I learned about recently whose power was cut off, which meant the insulin in his fridge was spoiled and then his sister found him dead next to a pile of CVs.”

He said, “Reading about abhorrent things like that obviously strikes a chord because it could so easily happen to someone like me or anyone I know.”

Brandon’s disability benefits were “stopped completely for about a year. After about six months when I finally managed to stage an appeal, I finally won it back, but even then it was cut by £30 a week, which has considerable effect monthly and yearly.”

The government’s blanket “reassessment” of disability payments had denied income to thousands of people: “Most people had their payments stopped and the people making the decisions aren’t actually qualified. It’s ‘healthcare professionals’ rather than doctors and nurses. They flat-out rejected most people because they worked on a points system.”

A Kafkaesque appeals process followed: “You have to apply for what’s called a mandatory reconsideration, where the same people who made the decision in the first place just look over it again, and obviously reject it again. And it’s only after that you can make an appointment for an appeal where lawyers and nurses are involved. But that process takes about six months. So the time building up to that, even though about 70 percent of the appeals win, the actual time it takes is far too long and leaves people without any money.”

Ria and **Kate** are students. Ria said, “Labour councils are pushing through the cuts just as bad. In Liverpool, on the Wirral, social housing landlords Magenta Living are privately selling off their stock and the Labour council has approved this. A Liberal Democrat counsellor opposed this and he was put down by the pro-Corbyn Labour faction.”

Kate said, “The National Health Service is being privatized, students aren’t being listened to even though we’re the future of this country. They know we’ve got no power. It’s not on. They want to make us pay for everything. Who put them in charge?”

Ria noted, “There won’t be an NHS in the next ten to fifteen years time if this government continues. I feel really sorry for people who work for the public sector at the minute because they’re on a one percent pay rise. It’s appalling what they’re doing to them. People working 16 hours only get paid for 12 hours. My mum recently took early retirement from the NHS because she was suffering health problems. It became all about numbers, getting patients in and out as quickly as possible rather than caring for them.”

Kate added, “In the last election Labour, for the first time, almost won. Jeremy Corbyn is changing things. He’s appealing to students who weren’t politically motivated before. We’re heading the right direction—we need to get rid of the Tories, they’re ruining everything.”

Asked what she thought about the role of Labour in the privatisation of the NHS and Corbyn’s record of capitulation to the right-wing since becoming leader, Kate said, “I do believe that’s wrong but he’s making a start. He wants to scrap tuition fees and educate people more. Yes, there are still people involved in the Labour Party who started privatization but the Tories are making it a lot worse, rather than sorting it out.”

Ria said, “The rich and the wealthy have all the

power in this country. Young people, ethnic minorities and poor people really don’t have a voice. It’s undemocratic. I think democracy is almost a lie. It’s made to look like it’s a democracy but really this country is run by rich politicians that don’t have a clue about normal working life, affordable housing, etc.”

Kate added, “We [the working class] were never supposed to succeed...It’s nearly impossible for us to get anywhere.”

Peter McCabe was at the demonstration to highlight what he described as the “asset stripping” of Manchester City Council. He explained that as part of boundary changes associated with ongoing “regeneration” projects on the outskirts of the city centre, the council is seeking to relocate Whitworth Park, one of the few large parks in the city, and the adjoining Whitworth Art Gallery—which is currently in the ward of Moss Side—into the Ardwick ward.

“I am here to oppose austerity and this is austerity. It’s taking off the poor and it’s giving to the rich. They are converting old buildings in Ardwick into apartments which are well outside the rental ability of people outside of the professional classes. It’s way out of the league of anyone that is in social housing, anyone that is on low pay, etc. How dare they take off us the only assets we have. These are public spaces. It’s an art gallery and a museum. If it can happen to us, it can happen to anybody. This is a national issue.”



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