

London protesters speak out in defence of the National Health Service

“The Conservatives don’t care how many people die so long as they line their pockets”

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to some of those attending Saturday’s demonstration in London to defend the National Health Service.

Kirsty works as a science editor:

She said, “The NHS is at crisis point and I think that if we don’t act now and invest more, in a few years’ time it will be too late and past the point of no return.

“I think we need to stop private companies from being able to make a profit from public services. The collapse of Carillion demonstrates that it is completely immoral to allow a private company to make a profit from a service without taking on any of the associated risk because you can’t be allowed to fail. You can’t stop cleaning hospitals! You can’t stop providing school meals and when the company goes bust the public has to take on the debt.

“Every penny of profit that a private company makes should be a penny that’s invested in an NHS service.”

Euna Jane Winfield, an activist fighting in defence of Charing Cross hospital in London said, “In 2016, the North West London sustainability and transformation plan (STP) was published and it contained the plan to close Ealing Hospital first and then Charing Cross hospital. It makes no sense. The NHS has lost half its beds in the last 30 years. It cannot go on haemorrhaging like this.

“A new organisation called an accountable care organisation is about to take control. This is an abomination because it involves the mix of private and public providers and it will muddy the water because every part of the organisation will be bound by contracts, which will not be transparent. They will not be publicly accountable.

“It is vital that we keep the NHS as a nationally provided publicly funded, publicly provided and publicly

accountable service.”

Alice, who recently underwent treatment in the NHS, said, “The NHS saved my life last year and it’s been deliberately underfunded. The NHS in critical care is first class, but it is in crisis in all other areas and this cannot continue. All other departments are chronically underfunded and it’s failing us.

“The government is trying to say they are giving more money, but in real terms it’s a big cut.

“We are in this situation every year in winter and the government denies there is a crisis. I know from my own experience in my last admission to hospital I was shifted onto four different wards in five weeks. I was on a waiting list because there were no available beds on the liver ward.”

Michelle, who attended the protest with her child and friends, said, “The NHS is in crisis because it’s been massively underfunded. There is a lack of beds, staff are leaving. They are stretched beyond belief and it needs to be funded. We need to spread the message and get everybody to stand up for the NHS and to vote this government out.”

Kate, who is fighting NHS cuts in Southend, said, “I am here today to fight and oppose the merger and cuts that are currently being proposed by the STP (sustainability and transformation plan) in Southend. We have real concerns backed up by clinicians that patients are going to die.

“There is only one thing that can stop this happening and that is to stop STPs, re-nationalise the NHS, stop privatisation, stop profiteers creaming off the top and ensure that patients come first, not profit.

“Austerity measures need to be stopped to end 120,000 excess deaths in the NHS. But at the moment we are seen

as collateral damage that is not important. Money is important; privatisation is important for this government and that needs to stop, otherwise we are going to lose our NHS for good.”

Sally, an activist from Hampshire, said, “I’m angry. The government is corrupt and is going to run the NHS into the ground. It’s a way to privatise it. People will say the NHS is no good, it’s failing.

“One of our local hospitals, the Winchester, will close its A&E [accident & emergency] and people will have to travel much further. Closing the A&E is a way of eventually closing our hospital. Everyone who goes into hospital sees that services are run down. The staff are tremendous—everyone praises the staff—but it’s getting to look like third world services.”

Emily is a consultant psychiatrist from Manchester:

“I’ve been a doctor for 10 years and I’ve seen the gradual dismantling of an extremely efficient, safe patient service in favour of private profits.”

Emily works in the early intervention and psychosis team in the community:

“We have seen a fragmentation—people going for scans, private MRI scans in a car park—and then it’s difficult for me to access what the results of that scan were, because it’s not attached to the local hospital.

“Patients themselves are being taken in psychiatric beds hundreds of miles away from their friends, their family. This is a shift from de-funding psychiatric inpatient beds in the NHS, reducing their numbers by the thousands in the last few years, to patients now having to be placed into private beds. That’s a huge drain on the pot of money that we have locally to be able to pay for community-based services.

“We know that there are about 100 MPs that have direct financial links to various private health organisations. NHS England CEO Simon Stevens has connections with Kaiser Permanente and other American-based healthcare systems.

“This is privatisation without a democratic mandate and with no consultation, so I applaud Stephen Hawking for winning a judicial review this week.

“Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt completely avoided the junior doctors and addressing their needs and concerns around patient safety two years ago and he is doing the same thing now.

“At the time of the Junior Doctors’ strike, we saw a huge amount of spin about cancelling elective operations on days that junior doctors were striking. Now the government has just said that cancelling elective

operations in January for four weeks, affecting hundreds of thousands of people, is an appropriate way of coping with the winter crisis.

“Labour says it offers an alternative, but I am extremely concerned about how easy it will be to reverse this huge amount of legislation with contracts that have been put in place, piece by piece, since the Health and Social Care Act. I really think it will be very hard. Buildings have been sold off, huge contracts have been signed. These are not things that can be reversed overnight.

“The amount of money involved is massive. Richard Branson of Virgin Care has just sued the NHS for not getting his contract and been awarded hundreds of thousands of pounds. We’d see a wave of that kind of court action.

“When I started being worried was when the Health and Social Care Bill was originally proposed. It had the phrase ‘any willing provider’ and the word ‘competition’ as mentioned 80-plus times and no mention made of cooperation or the idea of working together in a more socialist healthcare system.”

Petra, a student from Leicester, said, “Essentially without the NHS I would be dead. I have friends in America who can’t afford healthcare and they have to go to the emergency room with serious illnesses that could have been avoided. We’re in danger of going that same way in the UK. It’s broken. It’s evil. We can’t let that happen here.

“The winter crisis has been deliberately and cynically engineered as an excuse to sell the NHS off. At the end of the day, the Conservatives don’t care how many people die so long as they line their pockets. Because if you cut back on services then you can make a case for outsourcing, which you’ve seen with Carillion, etc. Look how many Tory MPs have affiliations with this company. They stand to gain because once they leave office they will have a cushy office job to walk into.”



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