

Wes Streeting insists no additional funding for Britain's NHS under Labour without “major surgery” through privatisation

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14 April 2024

UK Shadow Health Secretary Wes Streeting took to the pages of the right-wing *Sun* newspaper to make his latest attack on National Health Service (NHS) workers and double down on his demands for privatisation.

The *Sun* headlined with, “NHS NEEDS REFORM: Wes Streeting warns NHS that there’ll be no additional funding without ‘major surgery’ under Labour.”

The “major surgery” alluded to “would include bringing in the private sector to help cut waiting times.”

Streeting plans to impose weekend working as standard in the NHS under the pretext of cutting waiting lists now at over 7.5 million. He told the *Sun*, “Just one in every four people say they are satisfied with the NHS today,” and “Record numbers of people are waiting for treatment, and they are waiting longer than ever before.”

But far from criticising the Conservative government for failing to properly fund the NHS, he denounced the Tories for pouring funds away,” insisting that a Labour government also “Pouring more money in without reform would be like pouring water into a leaky bucket.”

Streeting complains that Prime Minister “Rishi Sunak responds that he is putting in record amounts of funding... But the NHS is a service, not a shrine.”

He insists, “The problems with the NHS are clear. It’s a 20th century service that hasn’t changed with the times and isn’t fit for the modern era.”

Between 2010 and 2019, the UK had a lower level of capital investment in healthcare and 18 percent lower average health spending than 14 European Union countries. But this is not the problem for Streeting. Like a born-again Thatcherite, he wants the “miracle of the market” to impose efficiency that will supposedly put an end to the NHS’s failure to meet the demands of its “clients”.

He pledges, “Operating theatres lie empty on weekends

while millions of patients wait. Labour will get the NHS working around the clock, with an extra two million appointments on evenings and weekends a year.”

“That’s the reform,” he boasts, and “It will come with investment of £1.1billion, to pay staff for the extra shifts.”

What can be said of the pittance offered up by Streeting? When Tory Chancellor Jeremy Hunt pledged an additional £3.3 billion to the NHS, experts said it was half of what was required just to cover the £7 billion deficit predicted by NHS England for 2022/23. Streeting offers a third of that figure.

Labour’s policy is to “use spare capacity in the private sector to cut the waiting lists,” wrote Streeting. And those who don’t accept a massive advance of the private sector in the NHS are “middle-class lefties” who “cry betrayal”.

Streeting later told the *Guardian*, “I say this as someone from a working-class background who is now a middle-class lefty.”

Those being denounced by this right-wing ideologue are the NHS workforce, and millions of workers opposed to turning health care into a corporate cash-cow. Privatisation of the NHS begun by the Tories was escalated under the Blair/Brown Labour government (1997-2010). By 2020, more than £100 billion in NHS contracts had already been handed to the private sector in the previous decade.

In December, the *Financial Times* noted, “Britain’s national health service is outsourcing more eye, hip and knee operations than ever...” It cited data from the National Joint Registry and the Royal College of Ophthalmologists showing that the “number of these routine operations carried out by the NHS in its own hospitals increased until 2014 but has barely risen in the past decade as the private sector takes on a bigger role...”

The FT then welcomes the fact that “Both the governing Conservative and opposition Labour parties have committed to greater use of the private sector in the NHS, with outsourcing expected to continue to underpin national policy.”

It was still forced to acknowledge that parasitic private firms are reliant on vastly overstretched NHS staff to actually perform the operations “in their spare time, potentially reducing their availability to state services.”

Streeting’s musings in the *Sun* are the latest in a stream of interviews with him in the capitalist media. Last month the *Financial Times* ran, “NHS should ‘seek to use’ private healthcare capacity, Wes Streeting says”. Last December the *Sunday Times* was told, “I don’t think it’s good enough that the NHS uses every winter crisis and every challenge it faces as an excuse to ask for more money”. Streeting made clear, “The NHS is going to have to get used to the fact that money is tight...”

In March last year, during industrial action by junior and senior doctors, Streeting became a poster boy for the *Telegraph* as the paper urged the government to face down and defeat health workers. It ran the article, “Wes Streeting: I don’t support the junior doctors’ strike.”

Streeting’s Thatcherite policies are manna from heaven for the capitalist class. Glowing editorials and op-eds met his *Sun* column. Kate Andrews in the *Telegraph* proclaimed, “Even Labour thinks the Tories are too Left-wing on the NHS”. She opined, “Wes Streeting is doing God’s work. The shadow health secretary is on a one-man mission to reveal the flaws in Britain’s favourite deity—also known as the NHS.”

Streeting was in agreement with the *Telegraph* in denouncing a “glorified idea of socialist medicine.” And it was “notable this week just how comfortable Streeting has become with this argument. It seems his trip to Australia and Singapore last winter to ‘learn from’ the health systems in other countries was a big success.”

Andrews was ecstatic because “When asked by Christopher Hope [of the right-wing GB News] if, hypothetically, he could clear the whole backlog by using only the private sector, Streeting answered without hesitation: ‘If you could, I would’”.

She complained that while the far-right Tory “Suella Braverman made the case for similar kinds of reform in the pages of this paper... where are the government ministers taking this fight to Labour?” Andrews urged the Tories to “seize this opportunity because at the moment they look more Left-wing than Labour, the party which created the UK’s nationalised, dysfunctional behemoth.

Streeting is laying down the law with the Left now...”

The *Sun*’s sister paper, the *Times*, in an editorial “NHS reform: Sacred Cow”, commended Streeting in the same terms: “That he chose to challenge this limping sacred cow in the pages of The Sun... is an encouraging sign.” He was “saying the right things,” including attacks on those “who abhor any private involvement in state healthcare.”

Every worker will understand the meaning of such praise lavished by the avowed backers of Margaret Thatcher on her modern-day acolytes, Streeting, Starmer, et al.

Significantly, there was one warning for Streeting amid the gushing praise. The ruling class wants Labour in office to enact its agenda against the working class, under conditions of war in Europe and the Middle East. Labour will be tasked with gutting social spending to fund the military budget and continue sating the appetites of the corporations and the super-rich.

The *Times* therefore warned, “The real test of his appetite for radical reform will be the extent to which Labour is prepared to face down the medical unions and especially the junior doctors’ absurd pay demands.”

Streeting in fact never tires of boasting that Labour will face down workers to impose its agenda. In his *Sun* piece he declares, “I don’t pretend reform will be easy. There will always be vested interests who resist change, but I’m up for the fight.”



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