

# NHS FightBack holds meeting to oppose Labour government cuts and privatisation

Our reporter  
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NHS FightBack held an online meeting Monday attended by health workers at the frontline of attacks on the National Health Service (NHS) by the Labour government.

The meeting was called mobilise health workers against Labour's NHS privatisation policies, including the mass transfer of staff to private subsidiaries.

Chair Robert Stevens explained that "NHS FightBack was initiated by the Socialist Equality Party in 2013 to build rank and file opposition to massive cuts to the National Health Service and plans to privatise it. That was being carried out by the Tory government then and it is being accelerated by the Labour government now."

Delivering the main report Ajitha, a senior nurse in Dorset, England said to other health workers on the call, "Your presence here reflects a shared commitment to the values we uphold in our fight for a better, more just healthcare system."

Ajitha explained, "I want to begin by condemning the anti-immigrant measures announced last Monday [May 12] by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer... who spoke about 'relieving the pressure on housing and social care'".

These measures included "ending overseas recruitment for social care work and a ban on visas for anyone without a degree", that would "spell disaster for the NHS... a staff survey published by the RCN [Royal College of Nursing] last Wednesday found nearly half of foreign NHS nurses plan to quit, citing Starmer's hostile climate for migrants. More than 55,000 international NHS nurses want to move away."

"The crisis in the NHS is not caused by foreign workers. Immigrants are the bedrock of the NHS and without them it would crumble," he insisted. "The real threat to the NHS comes from the Starmer government".

Starmer's Health Secretary Wes Streeting threatened before Labour had even taken office that "there would be 'no something-for-nothing culture' in the NHS. It was 'a service, not a shrine,' and we must all 'get used to the fact that money is tight.'"

In January, now in government, Streeting "launched a

sweeping privatisation drive under the guise of a 'partnership' with the private sector. This will funnel £2.5 billion of public money to private health firms to carry out a million treatments a year—outsourcing care instead of rebuilding the NHS.

"In March, mimicking Donald Trump and Elon Musk, Starmer and Streeting moved to abolish NHS England. Over 12,000 jobs were slashed overnight. Now the wrecking ball has swung even wider, targeting 42 Integrated Care Boards and hospitals with plans to axe over 100,000 NHS jobs."

"Hospitals in England are being ordered to slash services and staff to avoid a projected £6.6 billion deficit."

Ajitha reported that "University Hospitals Birmingham is preparing to cut 300 roles to save £130 million. Southampton plans to shed 785 jobs. Portsmouth: 549 jobs. The Isle of Wight: 249".

The attack on health workers was being intensified by the Labour government's demand that NHS Trusts set up subsidiary companies, SubCos, with workers being transferred outside of the NHS employment. "This is de facto fire and rehire, stripping away hard-won rights and protections." In Dorset, "Over 1,300 staff—including in housekeeping, catering, portering, estates, and health and safety—are being transferred into a new subsidiary company.

"SubCos began under Tony Blair in 2006 as a backdoor route to privatisation and spread like a disease under 14 years of Tory rule. By 2018, 42 NHS Foundation Trusts had created or were planning these entities, rising to over 65 by 2019."

A *Health Service Journal* study showed that Trusts had used SubCos to cut workers basic pay, conditions and pensions.

Ajitha added, "NHS workers are not a cost to be cut. Referring to a description of the NHS and its workers by Streeting, he said "You are not a 'black hole' You are the lifeblood of the NHS."

NHS FightBack would lead a fight against Labour "choosing to dismantle what generations of workers in this country fought to build... we say: Not in our name. Not on

our watch.”

That the fight could “not be waged on a local level, nor through the existing trade union apparatuses. Unison had not called a ballot for strike action against the Dorset Trusts. “Instead, they’re encouraging faith in petitions, appeals to MPs, trust boards, and governors—and token protests. We know where this leads... There is no party in Westminster defending public healthcare...”

“If there is going to be a fightback, we must organise it ourselves. That means preparing the necessary leadership by building a network of rank-and-file workplace committees across every hospital and care setting, led by the most trusted workers.”

Healthcare workers face the same attacks all over the world with governments facilitating the demands of the corporations to allow them to make even greater profits out of healthcare provision. One of the demands for the meeting was “Billions for healthcare, not military rearmament and war.” Ajitha explained, “NHS Fightback is affiliated to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and fights for a socialist programme placing society’s vast resources in the hands of the working class to be used for the benefit of all.”

In the discussion, health worker Sophie said she was affected by subcos and asked “what are the actions that I can take to support your plan of resistance? And what does a plan of resistance look like?”

Ajitha replied, “We have to organise rank and file committees in the workplaces and care settings and organise them politically against these attacks and prepare for a unified struggle of NHS workers. This would find enormous support from people in this country.

“When we criticise the unions, it is because they are not launching any meaningful opposition against these attacks. If you look over the last period, all the hard-won gains have been betrayed. Pay, terms and conditions have been eroded.”

Before the SubCo plan was introduced a “mutually agreed resignation scheme” (MARS) in Dorset was introduced last December. One of Ajitha’s colleagues in Southampton University Hospital had told him a MARS scheme was being introduced there as well.” Ajitha said these plans were not being fought by the unions.

Sophie responded “Thank you, I am fully aware of just how much our governments have destroyed our NHS, and I am ready to take the action necessary to stop the abuse of our NHS.”

Another attendee responded, “The pandemic has killed nearly 250,000 in the UK so far, an estimated 2 million people have Long COVID and approximately 100 people a week are still dying of COVID in 2025, according to UKHSA stats. Despite the mantra of ‘return to normal’,

austerity means the NHS cannot cope with the massive pressures of the pandemic, and the associated influx of new illness and disability.”

A medical student in Wales who could not attend for work reasons, sent a letter of support which was read out. The student said, “I can see that the unions can also offer no solution, from the actions of the doctors’ union, the British Medical Association (BMA). Junior doctors held some of the longest industrial action last year, only to be met with an awful deal, which wouldn’t have even covered the pay they lost from the strike action. I can see no way forward working with the heads of the trade unions, who are in the same leagues as the employers and government, agreeing to sellout deals behind the backs of their members....

“We therefore have to coordinate a movement of the rank and file, uniting all healthcare workers in defence of our jobs, our colleagues and our patients, to save our NHS!”

A member of the Postal Workers Rank and File Committee (UK) in the meeting explained, “I would like to thank the speakers and let them know that their struggle is similar to ours in many ways. From my experience, the best way to save your jobs and conditions and indeed the NHS is to form rank and file committees. Don’t trust the union hierarchy as they are collaborating with employers.”

Attendees were introduced to the campaign page on the *World Socialist Web Site* where health workers can join NHS FightBack, begin up a rank and file committee at their workplace; subscribe to the NHS Fightback Newsletter and read WSWs coverage on the struggle of healthcare workers in Britain and internationally.

The meeting concluded with a call for health workers to attend the May 31 public meeting in London hosted by the Socialist Equality Party: “Trump’s war on free speech: The case of Momodou Taal”. Tickets can be bought at Eventbrite here.



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