

Support the resident doctors' pay fight! For a united campaign by health workers to defend the NHS!

NHS FightBack
24 July 2025

Resident doctors in England are launching a five-day strike from 7 a.m. this Friday to fight the continued erosion of their pay, terms, and conditions. This is part of the most sustained and devastating assault on the National Health Service (NHS) in its history, being escalated by Keir Starmer's Labour government.

NHS FightBack urges doctors to link their pay fight to a mass working-class movement against the dismantling and privatisation of the NHS. This struggle must become the spearhead of a broader offensive to reverse decades of underfunding, outsourcing, and profiteering.

Over 90 percent of British Medical Association (BMA) members who voted in the recent industrial ballot called for strike action, expressing their deep anger over yet another below-inflation pay award. Since 2008, doctors' pay has been cut by over 25 percent in real terms. The final straw came with the May 22 report from the Doctors and Dentists Review Body (DDRB), which proposed a derisory 4 percent pay "uplift"—a further real-terms cut.

Doctors are demanding a 29.2 percent increase to restore their pay to 2008 levels. Working conditions have also sharply deteriorated, especially since the imposition of inferior contracts by the Conservative government in 2016—engineered with the complicity of the BMA, which sold out a powerful strike wave that year.

Doctors are now increasingly compelled to work up to 72 hours a week, well above their 48-hour contracts, due to chronic understaffing and rising demand. Training opportunities have collapsed, with five applicants chasing every available post. Many resident doctors, burdened with up to £100,000 in student debt, earn just £17 an hour in their foundation years and see no future in the UK. Thousands are considering emigrating.

Yet the BMA leadership responds with token gestures and empty appeals to Labour, refusing to wage any serious fight against a government pushing through Thatcherite, US-style "reforms".

In a recent statement, the co-chairs of the BMA's resident doctors committee (RDC), Dr. Melissa Ryan and Dr. Ross Nieuwoudt, pleaded: "No doctor wants to strike, and these strikes don't have to go ahead. If Mr Streeting can seriously come to the table... we can ensure that no disruption is caused. The Government knows what is needed to avert strikes. The choice is theirs."

But Health Secretary Wes Streeting has made clear that "pay is off the table." After the latest talks, he insisted there is "no money" and will only discuss non-pay matters like shift patterns, holiday planning, and career progression.

The government's refusal to even discuss doctors' pay demands exposes the futility of the BMA's appeals and the urgent need for a serious, industrial and political struggle.

The BMA's grovelling tone reflects its unwillingness to challenge a government slashing health budgets and fast-tracking NHS privatisation. In stark contrast, tens of thousands of resident doctors are ready to fight. The BMA, however, deliberately excluded doctors in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland from the strike ballot—sabotaging the potential for unified action, even though pay has been gutted across the UK.

Doctors must reject with contempt Labour's claim that "there is no money." The Starmer government is funnelling billions for war and rearmament and has pledged to raise defence spending to 5 percent of GDP to appease NATO and Washington. It is carrying out every demand of the financial oligarchy to increase profits at the expense of workers' lives.

The ruling class, terrified by growing resistance, is responding with venom to the doctors' fight.

The *Telegraph* handed a platform to Tory business spokesman Andrew Griffith, who raged: "This is the latest sign they will be using their bully-boy tactics to hold the country to ransom... Labour has bent over backwards for the unions... they are now running riot. They are out of control."

Sir Jeremy Hunt, the architect of years of NHS cuts,

sneered: “It’s totally ridiculous, having had a 22 percent pay rise [last year]... for them to be going on strike.”

Sir Iain Duncan Smith, the former Tory leader notorious for his role in welfare cuts and driving people into poverty, warned on *MailOnline*: “The unions are Labour’s paymasters... We’re heading towards all the lessons learned in the 1970s being reversed.”

Even the so-called liberal press has joined the chorus. Writing in the *Guardian*, Polly Toynbee scolded striking doctors for daring to press their demands for pay restitution in a “poorer country, with stagnant growth,” claiming it would throw the NHS “into reverse.”

Across the political spectrum, the message is the same: sit down, shut up, and take the cuts. What terrifies them is not disruption, but defiance.

Behind talk of “reform” and “modernisation” under the NHS Long Term Plan—shifting care from hospitals to communities, from analogue to digital, and from treatment to prevention—the Labour government is driving through cuts even the Tories dared not attempt. In January, Labour launched a £2.5 billion privatisation plan, outsourcing a million treatments per year. In March, it abolished NHS England, axing 12,000 jobs, with more to follow as Integrated Care Boards and hospitals face dismantlement. Over 100,000 NHS jobs are at risk.

To plug a projected £6.6 billion deficit, hospitals across England are slashing services and staff. Nearly half of NHS Trusts are cutting services, over a third are eliminating clinical roles, and more than a quarter are shutting down entire departments. Some fear they will soon be unable to pay staff wages.

Low-paid workers are being outsourced to private subsidiaries, tearing up the Agenda for Change pay system. The Royal College of Nursing is suppressing any fightback by its 350,000 members who work in the NHS, even as thousands face redundancy or privatisation.

The way forward

Between 2023 and 2024, resident doctors (then called junior doctors) mounted 44 days of strike action. But when Labour took office in 2024, the BMA’s Junior Doctors Committee (JDC) rushed to accept a 22.3 percent pay deal over two years—barely above 11 percent annually. This fell far short of their demand for a 35 percent pay restoration.

Streeter’s final offer was just 1 percent higher than the Tories’—yet the JDC hailed it as a “journey to pay restoration,” echoing Streeter’s own language. This was

not a compromise, but a betrayal aimed at demobilising a powerful movement.

Striking doctors must take their struggle out of the hands of the BMA bureaucracy. They must turn to nurses, allied health professionals, and all NHS workers facing the same attacks—including this year’s 3.6 percent pay “award”, which amounts to a real-terms pay cut.

NHS workers confront deliberate efforts by health union officials to prevent a unified campaign. The Royal College of Nursing is running a toothless survey asking nurses “Is 3.6% enough?” Nurses already know the answer. Responding last year to a survey by nursing charity Cavell, 92 percent of nurses reported that financial problems were “negatively impacting” their mental health; 59 percent said financial stress was making it difficult to focus at work.

Doctors, nurses and allied health professionals should initiate rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves, to lead the fight. These committees must unify NHS workers against the Starmer government and its corporate backers—against austerity, privatisation, and war.

The BMA, like all trade union leaderships, acts as an industrial policeman for the state and big business. It exists to suppress struggle and impose sell-outs. The only viable way forward is the adoption of a socialist perspective, breaking the grip of the financial oligarchy over society and expropriating the wealth of the major corporations and banks to pour billions into public health, housing and education.

NHS FightBack, established by the Socialist Equality Party and affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, is fighting to build this leadership across the health sector. Get involved today!



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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