

# The Real Choice

Scotland's Future / The Tory Threat

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# NHS

## **LABOUR'S WARNINGS ON FUTURE OF NHS**

### **Labour on Conservative's pre-election NHS plans**

Labour's warnings on the plans of the Conservatives to pursue austerity driven cuts, privatisation of the NHS, and patient charging pre-dates the coalition government in Westminster coming to office.

The Independent reported in 2004 that **Oliver Letwin** had reportedly told a private meeting that the "NHS will not exist" within five years of a Conservative election victory. Oliver Letwin was setting out what would become a precursor to the coalition Government Health and Social Care Bill (now Act 2012).

**Labour's Paul Boateng** (then Treasury Chief Secretary) said "This proves what we have said all along... Oliver Letwin and the Tories want to abolish the NHS as we know it. The Tory agenda is one of cuts, charges and privatisation."<sup>1</sup>

Labour's warnings of Oliver Letwin's plans for the NHS under a Conservative government were realised after the 2010 election. The Independent reported that the architects of the 'reforms' to NHS in England which has led to large-scale privatisation were as "...the key decisions were taken by Oliver Letwin and Danny Alexander, neither of whom had a background in health policy"<sup>2</sup>

And before the last Westminster election **Alasdair Darling** warned in 2009 "...a Tory party which has reverted to type and is relishing the chance to swing the axe at the public services millions rely on. Cuts driven by ideology..."<sup>3</sup>

### **During the 2010 Westminster election**

During the 2010 election Labour repeatedly made clear that the Conservatives were a threat to the future of the NHS.

**Labour MP Ian Murray's** 2010 election literature said "The Tory plans for immediate cuts to frontline services would mean less money for our NHS and all the other services we enjoy and cherish."<sup>4</sup>

Another **Scottish Labour** leaflet from the 2010 election says "Are the Tories a change you can afford? The NHS, which so many older people rely on, is not safe in the hands of the Tories" and also says that the Conservatives would "...cut faster and deeper than is safe – meaning cuts to services like schools and hospitals right now, this year, before the recovery is secured."<sup>5</sup>

Even the 2010 **Scottish Labour** election broadcast warned that "The Tories...They starved our schools and hospitals of funding and there's a real risk they would do the same again...They wouldn't fight for the NHS. They call it a 60 year mistake. The Tories remain out of touch with the people of Scotland. The Tories would wreck the recovery. Slash funding for schools and

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/letwin-nhs-will-not-exist-under-tories-6168295.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/lansley-was-shut-out-of-nhs-reform-meetings-7924941.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.labour.org.uk/alistair-darling-speech-conference,2009-09-28>

<sup>4</sup> <http://electionleaflets.org/leaflets/full/f0aeca2e77fc218c667e8d4307706aac/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://electionleaflets.org/leaflets/full/cc64dcf1cd5684fb3ee3012a52274ef1/>

hospitals. And stand up for the few, not the many, as they always have. **The Tories haven't changed.**"<sup>6</sup>

### **Following the coalition government taking office**

Following that election Labour's Iain Gray made this video as Scottish leader entitled "Iain Gray stands up for the NHS". In the video **Iain Gray** asks: **"What's going to happen when David Cameron's cuts start to hit? Scotland is worried and they are right to be worried."**<sup>7</sup>

Labour were right to raise concerns about the coalition government's austerity and cuts agenda, as this has seen the Scottish Government budget slashed by over 7% in real terms.

In the 2011 **Scottish Labour** continued to warn about the actions of the Conservative-Lib Dem government and said at the 2011 election, a leaflet delivered in Alistair Darling's Edinburgh South West constituency claimed that **"Only Labour has the strength to stand up to the Tories and their cuts."**<sup>8</sup>

### **Health and Social Care Act**

During the passage of the Bill and through the implementation of the Act there have been many voices warning about the impact of the legislation.

In 2011 **Ed Miliband** warned in the New Statesman **"...do we really want healthcare to be run on the same basis as the privatised utilities?"**

**Andy Burnham** said in his 2013 conference speech that in England they were witnessing **"The first steps towards an American healthcare system. English hospitals now asking for credit cards before they give care."**

**Andy Burnham:** **"privatisation is being forced through at pace and scale...Commissioners have been ordered to put all services out to the market, NHS spending on private and other providers has gone through the £10bn barrier for the first time"**. (Guardian 29 July 2014)

**Andy Burnham** said only last month that in England **"NHS privatisation is now proceeding at pace and scale..."** and warned that **"Five more years of the same would push the NHS off the cliff-edge where it now finds itself"**. (Speech 29 July 2014)

**Andy Burnham** **"Cameron raided NHS budget whilst handing out tax cuts to millionaires and P45s to nurses"** (Labour website, 21 March 2013)

**Andy Burnham** **"Slowly but surely, we are moving away from a national health service with clear entitlements and towards a series of local health markets where unaccountable commissioners decide what people can have."** (Speech 29 July 2014)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CenY-DlmlKc>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27KSVGJwziY>

<sup>8</sup> <http://electionleaflets.org/leaflets/full/554b0084-70a6-43c7-bfe3-7a2abef19b43/>

**Andy Burnham** “...this government sees no limits on the extend of privatisation in the NHS.”  
(Radio 4, 29 July 2014)

**Andy Burnham** “...it’s you that matters, not your bank balance or the wishes of shareholders, and if we allow the continued advance of **the market into the NHS it will eventually destroy everything that’s precious about it.**” (Radio 4, 29 July 2014)

**Andy Burnham** “The **NHS is being broken up and privatised – without the consent of the public. Who gave this arrogant Prime Minister permission to put the NHS up for sale? The answer is no one** – and that is why, across the land, anger is rising.”<sup>9</sup>

**Labour MP Michael Meacher** has warned that the Conservatives want to go further, and that “**We now see why the Tories have been so keen to demean the NHS on every occasion** over the past few months. Cue the need to junk the old, failing NHS and **announce the dawn of a brand-new, burnished private healthcare system – and at a bargain price of £10 a month.** But remember tuition fees: capped at £3,000, then trebled. If every UK adult paid £10 a month, this new tax would raise £5.4bn. Treble that, or more, and we're talking serious money for the healthcare privateers.”<sup>10</sup>

**Michael Meacher** also warned “...now we know the latest steps being proposed to make the NHS into a full-blown private health service, just like it was before 1948...**now the truth has been let out of the bag that the Tories and their big corporate friends had in fact intended all along that it would become a fully paid-for service, only they didn’t dare say so before now.**”<sup>11</sup>

**Labour in England** say charges are being introduced for treatments, stating in their document ‘The Choice’ that “**Under [The Tories] there is the prospect of more NHS services being charged for, and fewer services being provided free at the point of need.**”

### **Labour in Wales**

Labour in Wales have also warned about the impact of the austerity, privatisation and patient charging agenda coming from Westminster.

**Welsh Labour Health Minister Mark Drakeford** said recently “**The fundamental issue...is the impact on public services in Wales of the cuts being made by [the] administration in Westminster, and passed down to Wales. That is what the fundamental problem is here: we have a Westminster Government that believes in shrinking the state, which believes in doing less through the public realm, and passes less money down to us in order to be able to do it.**”  
(Welsh Assembly debate 17 June 2014).

**Mark Drakeford** has also said: “**The government at Westminster has an ideological view that the state is too big. By 2015 they will have spent five years reducing it. If they are presented with another five years of doing that, the NHS in Wales will be a very different organisation to the one it is today.**” (IWA, Winter 13/14 Issue)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/mums-new-jarrow-march-save-4057184>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/apr/01/nhs-fees-plan-turning-point-privatisation>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.michaelmeacher.info/weblog/2014/03/the-latest-privatisers-idea-for-the-nhs-make-everyone-pay-10-a-month-for-access/>

## **Labour and the Referendum**

Before the referendum Labour in Scotland was one of the many voices warning about the impact of Conservative cuts to Scotland's budget and the potential impact on public services like the NHS.

With the referendum approaching Labour in England and Labour in Wales continue to warn about the effects of the austerity, privatisation, and patient charging agenda on both services and devolved budgets.

With Labour in Scotland in alliance with the Conservatives they have sadly chosen to become blind to the issue, and have even started defending Conservative health policy.

**Alasdair Darling** said on BBC Radio Scotland<sup>12</sup> that "I think the NHS is something that the whole country, whether you are in Scotland or the rest of the UK, values and will woe betide any politician or any political party who tries to interfere with the principal of a service being there when you need it at no cost to the individual... What **I'm saying is that there is no political party in the United Kingdom, at the moment, that could get away with destroying the NHS. Mrs Thatcher looked at it in the 1980s and even she backed off** because it doesn't matter how people vote if the people are very, very committed to the NHS."

Yet **Andy Burnham** said in England "**Who gave this Prime Minister permission to put our NHS up for sale, something which Margaret Thatcher never dared?**" (Speech, February 2014)

**Andy Burnham** has also said that **after 2015 it'll be too late to save the NHS in England from privatisation** – "All the legal advice I am getting says, while we will just about be able to pull it back at the 2015 election, after that, it will be gone." (Independent 10 January 2014<sup>13</sup>)

**Alasdair Darling** also claimed on Radio Scotland that "**Spending on the NHS...has carried on increasing for the last four years under the present Government**".

Yet **Andy Burnham** warned in 2012 that the coalition Government had "**...cut the NHS budget for two years running and he owes it to patients and NHS staff to be honest about that.**"<sup>14</sup>

When pushed **Alasdair Darling** finally revealed the truth and admitted that there was a threat to Scotland's budgets, telling BBC Radio Scotland "**Look, it is no secret that the Tories have long had their sights on public spending.**"

Labour know the impact of further Westminster austerity, privatisation and patient charges in England will pose a threat to Scotland's budget for public services, including the NHS. But through the No campaign they find themselves in the role as cheerleaders for the Conservative party.

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<sup>12</sup> 19 August 2014 BBC GMS

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/privatisation-agenda-drives-tory-policy-on-nhs-says-andy-burnham-9052640.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-20600852>

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