

GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING

Just before the 1983 general election the Conservatives put a lot more cash into the Health Service. After they had won the election they took it away again and imposed cuts in staff. As the next election approaches the Government have said once more that they are putting extra funds into the NHS. It is clear that these spending increases will not continue after the election and that patient charges will rise.

BE WARNED: These empty promises may win your vote,
but could seriously damage your health.

THE CONSERVATIVES CLAIM TH

The NHS is getting enough...

The Government claims that between 1979 and 1986 spending on the NHS in England rose from £6.4 billion to £14.7 billion — an increase of **129%**. They sometimes admit that when this figure is adjusted to take account of the general rate of inflation, the increase goes down to just **21%**.

And as the Government itself confesses, the cost of items and services bought by the health service rose faster than the general rate of inflation. When this is taken into account the increase goes down to just **9.4%**.

Meanwhile, there are more demands on the NHS. We have increasing numbers of old people in our society who need — and deserve — decent health care. Under this Government there has also been a significant increase in unemployment, homelessness, overcrowding, violent crime and poverty as the gap has widened between rich and poor. This has led to a greater number of people who get sick more frequently than those who are well housed, well nourished, and well off. In other words there are now more people who need to use the health service more often.

New technology has also led to faster, better and more efficient ways of treating people. But it can be expensive and extra funding is needed to keep all the equipment up to date.

Last year even the House of Commons Social Services Committee — which is dominated by Conservative MPs — accused the Government of spending too little on running hospitals and community services. They said that: "The most telling way of representing the shortfall is to say that between 1980/81 and 1985/86 **the cumulative total underfunding ... was £1.325 billion** at 1985/86 prices, after taking full account of the cash releasing cost improvements." They concluded that: "The Government has done no more than half what, by its own admission, it ought to have done."

More patients are treated than ever before...

The Government claims that the NHS is now treating more people than ever before. But this is based on the total number of visits made to hospitals each year not the total number of patients treated. So if one person visits a hospital six times during the course of their treatment, they are counted in six times. Cuts in the numbers of beds, cuts in back-up ancillary workers and overworked doctors and nurses means that treatment is often rushed. People have to return to hospital because they are not treated properly the first time. As a joint report from the Royal College of Nursing, the British Medical Association and the Institute of Health Service Managers pointed out:

"A rise in the number of patients treated may not be a sign that health service outcomes have improved. Indeed, it may simply mean that health services have simply adopted a revolving door policy...."

"Even with these increases in activity rates in the NHS, all health care needs cannot be met now and will not be met in the future. Rationing is inevitable and in extreme cases, decisions are made about who will die and who will live and in what degree of pain and discomfort."

There is no more money for the NHS...

The Government always says that it would like to spend more on the NHS but the money simply isn't there. They try to give the impression that putting money into the NHS is like throwing money down a bottomless pit. But really it's all about priorities.

In 1986/87 they spent millions more on defence than they did on the health services. They have also agreed to buy the American Trident weapons system which will cost us at least £10 billion — and millions of other people their lives if it is ever used. Few of the jobs created from this order will be for people in this country. It would have been much better if the money had been invested in our health service. The NHS has given millions of people happier more rewarding lives — and it produces a lot more work. In fact, it's much better value all round.

It is reckoned that for every £1 billion spent on defence, 75,710 jobs are created. Yet £1 billion spent on the NHS produces 139,000 jobs. That must be a good thing — at least most people seem to think so. A recent Gallup Poll showed that:

64% of those asked opposed Trident

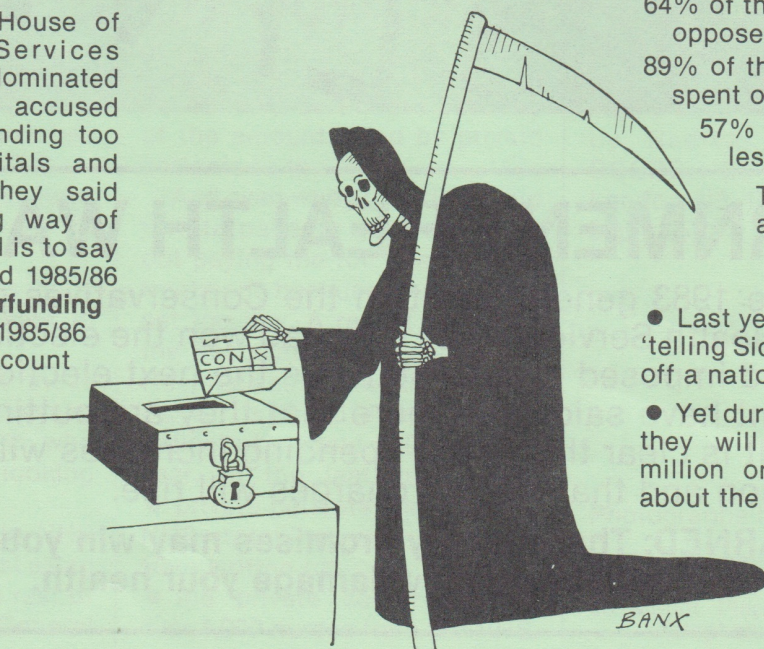
89% of those asked wanted more spent on the NHS

57% of those asked wanted less spent on defence.

The Government have always managed to find money for other pet projects too.

- Last year they spent £41 million 'telling Sid' that they were flogging off a national asset, British Gas.

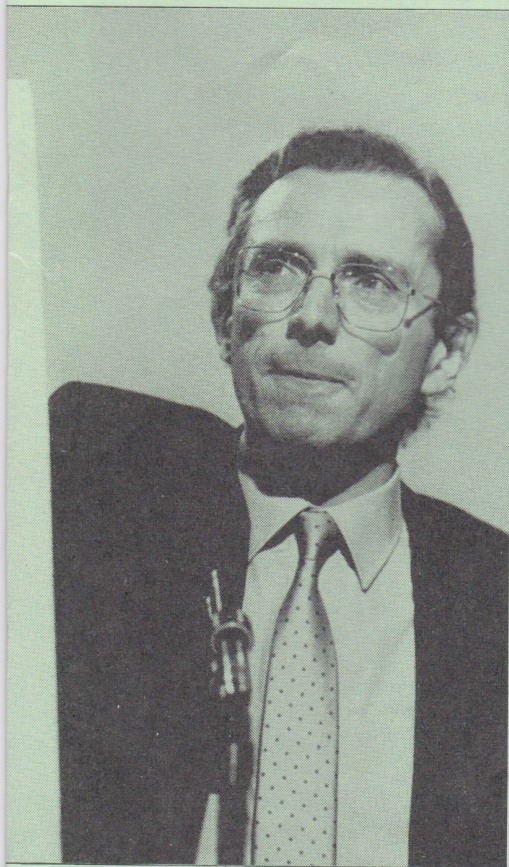
- Yet during the whole of this year they will spend less than £30 million on advertising the facts about the killer disease AIDS.



AT

They are building more hospitals...

The Government are very proud of their capital programme. Here is the Health Secretary Norman Fowler brandishing a list of new hospital schemes at last year's Conservative Party conference. He told the faithful: "Some 380 hospital schemes each worth over £1 million are in our current programme."

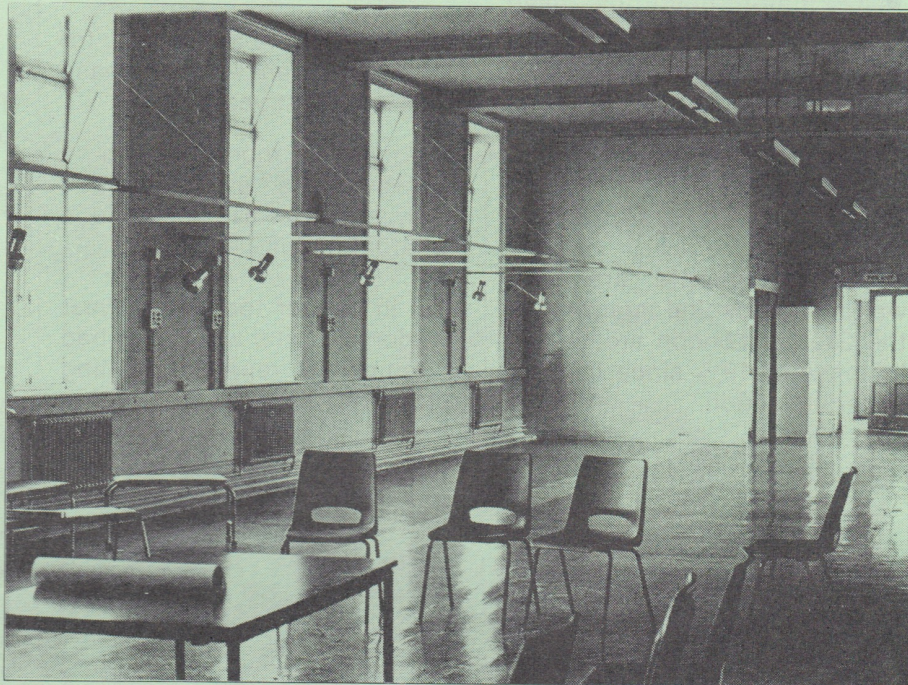


The reality was very different.

- One had been cancelled even as he spoke
- Ten will not start until at least 1996
- One scheme appeared on the list seven times
- Other schemes appeared on the list four or five times in different categories
- Only 113 will be completed in the next three years
- One constituted no more than a new boiler at a hospital
- Most are still vague plans
- The whole programme is no more than 6% of the total NHS budget.

but their cuts have meant...

- Hospital wards lying empty.



- Since 1979 the Conservatives have put up patient charges to record levels.
- Prescription charges have risen from 20p to £2.40 — a rise of over 1000%. The introduction of the limited list also means that many other people are now forced to pay the total cost of their medicine.
- The maximum dental charge has risen from £30 to £115 — a rise of nearly 400%.
- In April 1985 the Government stopped the general supply of NHS glasses.

The cash crisis is also causing severe difficulties in other areas of the Health Service:

- 161 hospitals have closed.
- 36,311 beds have been lost — more than 10% of the total bed stock.

Many of these places were for people who were elderly, or mentally ill or mentally handicapped. The Government decided that these people should be turned out of hospitals and looked after in the community. But the Audit Commission observed that this policy was "in some disarray". In fact, they said, "No one really knows what happens to many people after they are discharged".

Many are now leading lonely miserable lives in bed-and-breakfast hotels or in squalid bedsits. The only real benefit of 'Community Care' has been to landlords and the owners of small 'rest homes'. They are now being paid more than £500 million a year in supplementary benefit payments to give these people shelter.

There has also been a dramatic loss in the number of acute beds — ie those needed for emergencies or people having operations and tests.

- 12,576 acute beds have been lost — a cut of 8.6%.

Largely because of this hospital waiting lists have risen consistently. The Government have changed the way the figures are presented **three times** in an effort to keep them down. Despite this:

- 681,901 people are now waiting for hospital treatment — an increase of 8,800 in the last year.
- 47,561 people are now waiting for urgent treatment — an increase of 10% on last year.

In fact, on average there are 80,000 more people waiting for treatment under this Conservative Government than there were under the last Labour Government.

And in London and the South East.....

Cuts in spending have hit hardest in London and the Home Counties. Since 1980:

- 32 major hospitals have closed.
- 5 major hospitals were shut in 1986 alone.
- 7,767 beds have been lost — this includes 10% of acute beds and 33% of "mainly or partly acute" beds.
- 130,000 people are now waiting for hospital treatment in the Greater London area — an increase of 19% since the last general election.

- 64,454 people are now waiting for treatment in inner London — an increase of 25% since the last general election.

- 13,820 people are waiting for urgent treatment — an increase of 24% on last year.

And there are more closures on the way. Plans have been made to shut another **five** hospitals in Greater London.

Still in danger too is the West London Hospital which has had a temporary reprieve pending further discussions.



Working in the NHS — but for how long?

Cuts in the NHS have been the Government's green light to commercial medicine which has expanded rapidly since 1979.

- 78 new private hospitals have opened since 1979 — an increase of 33%.
- There are now twice as many private beds as there were in 1979.
- The vast majority of these new beds — 85% — are owned by American corporations who have flooded into Britain looking for a profit.

And private paybeds in NHS hospitals continue to exist as an expensive burden on the rest of the NHS. In 1985 the Auditor General

refused to give the NHS accounts a certificate because of the amount owed by private patients to the NHS.

And even when they do pay up private patients get away without paying the full cost of their treatment because charges are set too low. A recent report by the Association of Independent Hospitals estimated that the tax payer subsidises private patients by about £40 million a year. In the last year alone:

- private patients' debts to the NHS totalling over £640,000 were written off
- the private sector leached over 1,000 nurses from the NHS.

This leaflet is published jointly by

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The NHSCA was formed in 1976 and represents NHS consultants who are unambiguously in favour of the NHS — and in favour of defending and improving it.

and

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NHS Unlimited brings together a wide range of people who support and defend the basic principles of the NHS, including many who work within it. Specifically, the Committee collects and disseminates information on the commercial medical sector and on the hiving off of NHS services to the private sector.

Further information can be found in a recent book *Facing the figures — what really is happening to the NHS* published by Radical Statistics, c/o BSSRS, 25 Horsell Road, London N5 1XL (Price £3.95 + 50p p&p).

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