

PRIME MINISTER

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Nat Health

MR. FOWLER'S STATEMENT ON NHS PAY

Mr. Fowler was on belligerent form, and managed to make the Opposition appear as though they were supporting the strike action planned for Monday.

Gwyneth Dunwoody led for the Opposition, and claimed that Mr. Fowler had tried to blackmail the health unions, divide the Royal College of Nursing from the other unions, and had threatened the regional health authorities. She claimed that the revised allocations to RHAs, that he announced yesterday, represented a direct cut in services. She painted the letter describing the pay offer to be included in NHS pay packets as a deliberate attempt to influence the RCN's ballot.

Mr. Fowler described her remarks as absurd. The Government was providing more money for the NHS in real terms than any previous government. He was sure the House would support the Government's efforts to make known the facts on the pay offer, especially in view of the rubbish being peddled by the Opposition. He used the 1979 quote from David Ennals who had condemned action that might harm the sick, and called on Mrs. Dunwoody and the Opposition to condemn the strike.

Mrs. Dunwoody repeated her accusation that the Government was trying to cut the resources available to the health service, and said that she would certainly condemn those who were forcing the health service workers to strike. She was joined by William Hamilton and Laurie Pavitt who said that they would be proud to join the picket lines. This allowed Norman Fowler to condemn the Opposition for standing behind the strikers in the same way as they were standing behind ASLEF. He said that they should be ashamed and not proud to join the picket lines. He made effective use of the facts on the resources available to the NHS, the increasing number of nurses and other staff, the shorter hours being worked, the cuts in waiting lists which had been achieved, the fact that the Government had already ^{improved} made their offer twice, and the fact that the Government had offered negotiations on long-term pay arrangements.

16 July 1982

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STATEMENT ON NHS PAY DISPUTE

With permission Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on next week's threatened industrial action in the National Health Service.

The health service unions affiliated to the TUC have called for a three day national strike throughout the health service starting on Monday. This action is in support of their claim for pay increases of 12 per cent.

Each health authority will do everything it can to maintain services and to minimise the effect of action on patients in accordance with the guidance we issued in 1979. The Government have made contingency arrangements to maintain emergency services where these are withdrawn.

But I must warn the House that if industrial action is taken for three days patients will suffer. In the previous 24-hour stoppages the response was patchy but seriously disrupted services in some places. If the strike goes ahead outpatient appointments and non-emergency admissions will be cancelled and waiting lists for operations will grow longer. Past experience suggests that not even emergency services can be guaranteed in all areas.

Mr Speaker, I believe that in the light of this, the health unions should now urgently reconsider their case for taking industrial action. Their claim for a 12 per cent increase in pay and improvements in holidays and hours of work making a claim of 20 per cent in all is quite unjustified. Over £400 million has been provided for increases in pay this year. That is our final ^{decision} offer and there is no more money. The offers made by the Whitley Councils are for average increases

ranging from 6 to 7½ per cent. This compares with settlements around 6 per cent for civil servants, teachers and the armed forces. The money on the table, backdated to 1 April, is substantial. We estimate that average earnings would increase by £6.00 a week for a male full-time ancillary worker, £7.50 a week for a staff nurse, over £9.00 a week for a nursing sister and £11 a week for a leading ambulanceman.

In addition the Government have already started talks on permanent new arrangements for determining nurses and midwives pay which we want in operation by next April. I have also offered to have talks with the health unions about improving arrangements for their pay in the future.

Mr Speaker, on pay for this year the right action for the unions would be to return to the Whitley Councils and begin discussions. On future arrangements for pay talks between myself and the unions could start at once. I urge all those working in the health service not to take industrial action. Such action will only damage the health service and put patients at risk.

National Health Service (Pay Dispute)

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on next week's threatened industrial action in the National Health Service.

The Health Service unions affiliated to the TUC have called for a three-day national strike throughout the Health Service starting on Monday. This action is in support of their claim for pay increases of 12 per cent. Each health authority will do everything that it can to maintain services and to minimise the effect of action on patients in accordance with the guidance that we issued in 1979.

The Government have made contingency arrangements to maintain emergency services where these are withdrawn, but I must warn the House that if industrial action is taken for three days patients will suffer. In the previous 24-hour stoppages the response was patchy, but seriously disrupted services in some places. If the strike goes ahead out-patient appointments and non-emergency admissions will be cancelled and waiting lists for operations will grow longer. Experience suggests that not even emergency services can be guaranteed in all areas.

I believe that in the light of this, the health unions should now urgently reconsider their decision to take industrial action. Their claim for a 12 per cent. increase in pay and improvements in holidays and hours of work, making a claim of 20 per cent. in all, is quite unjustified. Over £400 million has been provided for increases in pay this year. That is our final offer and there is no more money.

The offers made by the Whitley councils are for average increases ranging from 6 per cent. to 7½ per cent. This compares with settlements of around 6 per cent. for civil servants, teachers and the Armed Forces. The money on the table, backdated to 1 April, is substantial. We estimate that average earnings would increase by £6 a week for a male full-time ancillary worker, £7.50 a week for a staff nurse, over £9 a week for a nursing sister and £11 a week for a leading ambulance man.

In addition, the Government have already started talks on permanent new arrangements for determining nurses' and midwives' pay which we want in operation by next April. I have also offered to have talks with the health unions about improved arrangements for pay in the future.

On pay for this year, the right action for the unions would be to return to the Whitley councils and begin discussions. On future arrangements for pay talks between myself and the unions could start at once. I therefore urge all those working in the Health Service not to take industrial action. Such action will only damage the Health Service and put patients at risk.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe): Is it not now clear that after trying to blackmail the health unions, trying to divide the Royal College of Nursing from the health unions and threatening the regional health authorities, the Minister has had to admit that what he is suggesting is no new money in terms of pay and a direct cut in patient care? Since this is a clear attempt to influence the RCN ballot of nurses, will the Minister make it clear that his offer is worth 69p to student nurses and £1.31 to nursing officers? Will he make it clear that he has been fiddling the figures, not the health unions?

~~Will the Minister make it plain that he has intended all along to cut the resources available to the National Health Service and that if at the same time he can clobber the health unions that is to him a positive political advantage?~~

~~What is the cost to the regional health authorities of the extraordinary letter that he insists they print at short notice and circulate to all staff? Who will pay for that? Will the Minister admit that the real cost of the poor deal that he is offering—a deal which will be rejected by the health unions because of its unacceptable terms and because it is a direct attack on the fabric of patient care?~~

Mr. Fowler: I reject everything that the hon. Lady has said. It was totally absurd from beginning to end. She knows that her claim that the Government have cut spending on the Health Service is totally untrue. The Government are spending more money, in actual and real terms, on the Health Service than any other Government in the history of the Health Service.

Even with the adjustments which I announced yesterday, there will be a growth of 1.3 per cent. in Health Service spending for this year. That is the fact, and I ask the hon. Lady to check it and accept it.

The hon. Lady obliquely recognises that the Royal College of Nursing is balloting on the offer. I hope that she welcomes that development. The hon. Lady asked about circulating in wage packets the details of the offers by the management side of the Whitley councils. Surely the hon. Lady supports that. Is it not a good idea that the members concerned should know the facts of the offers instead of listening to the rubbish which the hon. Lady insists on putting before the House?

Mrs. Dunwoody rose—

Mr. Fowler: It looks as though the hon. Lady intends to intervene again, so perhaps she will make the Opposition's position clear. Her right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Ennals), when Secretary of State, said:

"I believe that we should condemn industrial action that does damage to the Health Service, whether it comes from doctors, nurses or any one else who works in the service."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1979; Vol. 961, c. 1684.]

Do the Opposition stand by that statement? Are the Opposition prepared to condemn industrial action? If they are not, they have no credibility.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the Minister now answer the questions that I asked him? How much will the offer mean in real terms for the health authorities? He knows that, far from a growth of 1 per cent., there will be a direct cut in patient care. How much will it cost the regional health authorities to circulate copies of the 12-page letter which represents a straight attempt to influence the RCN ballot?

If the Minister wants condemnation from the Opposition, let me make our position clear. We condemn those who seek to push Health Service workers, who are committed to caring for patients, into industrial action to which they are totally opposed and which he is forcing upon them.

Mr. Fowler: The House will recognise the hon. Lady's remarks as weasel words. Is she or is she not condemning industrial action in the Health Service? She is not, and once again the Opposition are showing no leadership.

The growth in the Health Service for this year will go down from 1.7 per cent. to 1.3 per cent. That is the fact. ~~That is the price of the wages offer. It is extraordinary for~~

and 13 July are days with a difference. If the hon. Gentleman had visited the Province with his friends on those two days he might have been enlightened to his advantage in the representations that he makes at the Dispatch Box today. I hope that the promise given by the Government on that occasion to which the hon. Gentleman referred will be implemented. If all the hon. Members for Northern Ireland, including the hon. Member for Belfast, West, had been present, that would not have altered the vote.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a comment such as that made by the hon. Member for Hammersmith, North (Mr. Soley) comes ill from a party that does not seek to represent the Northern Ireland electorate in the proper democratic manner? When that party seeks to do so, then, and only then, can it be listened to on the matter of attendance or non-attendance of hon. Members from Northern Ireland at debates in the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I should certainly welcome members of the British Labour Party standing as candidates for the Assembly. They have the opportunity to give their blessing to it. The hon. Member for Hammersmith, North could stand himself. I advise him to come to North Antrim, and I am sure that the right hon. Member for Down, South (Mr. Powell) would invite him to South Down as well. He would receive a hearty welcome, but not a good vote, and would probably lose £150, which would be a salutary experience. However, I do not want to deal with such matters today as there are other important matters to be debated.

I was pleased to hear the Minister praise the Common Market and its assistance for Northern Ireland, but I am amazed that he has failed to suggest that the less favoured

areas should receive support from the Common Market. I press the Minister on this matter. This is a running sore among farmers in Northern Ireland, as I am sure he is aware because the matter has been raised over and over again.

May we be told today what will happen? Will the Government now proceed with an application to the Common Market for assistance for the less-favoured areas of Northern Ireland? Are the Government prepared to put up their part of the money so that those less-favoured areas can be helped? I am sure that the Minister is well aware that this important matter will effectively assist the farming community in Northern Ireland.

Will the Minister deal at length with this problem and ensure, first, that the Common Market will receive an application for assistance for the less-favoured areas in Northern Ireland and, secondly, that the Government will put up our part of the money? It has been made clear at the Dispatch Box that the Government are not yet committed to putting forward an application to extend the less-favoured areas. I trust that the Minister will say something about that.

Perhaps the Minister can explain the announcements in January and March about the Common Market special repayments schemes and why none of the £50 million allocated to housing in Northern Ireland is additional money for the housing executive. Some of the trouble with the German Government stems from that. My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and I met the German ambassador in London—

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5 (Friday sittings).



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*From the Secretary of State for Social Services*Michael Scholar
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street

15 July 1982

Dear Michael

I attach a copy of the draft statement my Secretary of State intends to make in the House of Commons tomorrow.

I am also sending a copy to Muir Russell (Scottish Office), Adam Peat (Welsh Office), Nick Huxtable (Lord President's Office) and Terry Mathews (Chief Secretary's Office).

*Yours ever
Mary McVerry*MARY McVERRY (MRS)
Private Secretary

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STATEMENT

With permission Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on next week's threatened industrial action in the National Health Service.

The health service unions affiliated to the Trade Union Congress have called for a three day national strike throughout the health service starting on Monday. This action is in support of their claim for pay increases of 12 per cent.

Every health authority will do everything they can to maintain services and to minimise the effect of action on patients in accordance with the guidance we issued in 1979. The Government have made contingency arrangements to maintain emergency services where these are withdrawn.

But I must warn the House that if industrial action is taken for three days the public will suffer. The experience of the previous 24-hour stoppages is that the response will be patchy but will seriously disrupt services in some places. Out-patient appointments and non-emergency admissions will be cancelled and the waiting lists will grow. Nor can the unions' claim that emergency services will be maintained be guaranteed in all areas.

The health unions should reconsider their case for taking action. Their claim for a 12 per cent increase in pay and improvements in holidays and hours of work making a claim of 20 per cent in all is quite unjustified. The Government have provided no less than £400 million for increases in pay this year. There is no more money. The offers made by the Whitley Councils are for increases ranging from 6 to 7½ per cent. This compares with settlements around 6 per cent for civil servants, teachers and the armed forces. The money on the table, back-dated to 1 April, is substantial. We estimate that average earnings would increase by £7.50 per week for a staff nurse, over £9 for a nursing sister, £11 for a leading ambulanceman, over £8 for a physiotherapist on the minimum of the scale and £18 at the maximum and over £6 per week for a male full-time ancillary worker.

These are very reasonable offers. I urge all those working in the service not to take industrial action. It can achieve nothing but damage the service and put patients at risk. They should tell their leaders to return to negotiations in the Whitley Councils. I stand ready to discuss pay arrangements for the future to see if we can find a way to avoid this annual crisis. The Government has demonstrated its commitment to the health service. I urge the unions and the health service workers to do the same.