

The Election 2015: Things To Consider

It is not my business to influence your vote, to tell you to vote, or to tell you not to vote; you must obey your own conscience upon consideration of the facts. My job is to help you see the facts. This paper, therefore, seeks to give you the most up-to-date information, fully sourced, on the most important issues facing the electorate. This paper is just facts; important facts.

Why do you need facts? Because politicians lie and obfuscate over and over again. They do this in multiple ways. They blatantly lie. They obscure the truth. They cause confusion to obscure a failing. They mention a true fact but ignore multiple issues that change that fact. They use past figures pretending that they are current figures. And so on.

I will give but one example of this. Last night, on a BBC 2 political debate programme (Newsbeat), members of the public were sharing stories about the lack of NHS staff and the overwork and stress experienced by nurses. In response a Tory minister stated that the Coalition had provided 7,000 additional nurses. This shut the audience up who could not comment. In fact the truth is that under the Coalition there are 1845 fewer nurses now than in 2010. The minister told a barefaced lie. The Coalition may have added 7,000 nurses at some point but did nothing to stop many more nurses quitting, moving jobs, or emigrating due to the stress they caused. In fact so many nurses have left the NHS that a quarter of nursing staff are now recruited from abroad at tremendous cost.

For the sake of openness I will explain my own political bias.

I am neither left nor right in the political debate; indeed, I do not consider that any party standing in the UK today is worthy of full support by Christians. Furthermore, all of the parties have made serious, predictable, avoidable mistakes and are guilty of significant scandals. The major parties have also followed their ideological bias in opposition to the will of the people. However, there are a few local people standing that appear to have integrity and seek to do good in all the parties. There are also small new parties that are acting on principle, such as the National Health Action Party.

Though I avoid such labels, some would consider me slightly left of centre, however, regarding political control I am more libertarian than totalitarian (this is not economic libertarianism).

Left-wing policies would include the necessary re-nationalisation of vital industries, such as the utilities, Royal Mail, and the railways. The privatisation experiment has failed, as expected. Prices to the consumer are much higher than they used to be and the massive profits all go to overseas businessmen and shareholders instead of being invested in England.¹ Britain should own its own vital infrastructure. I also support a properly funded state-sponsored housing and roads programme.

However, right wing policies would include a decentralised, small national government and a fairly laissez-faire capitalist economic policy with necessary regulation of banks which should be reduced in size, with speculative investment being split from domestic accounts.

¹ For example: EDF energy is owned by the French state-owned EDF SA; EON is owned by a German company. The various water companies are owned by groups in Canada, Australia, Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia and other areas. The train and bus company Arriva is owned by Germany's Deutsche Bahn. BAA (airports) was sold to a Spanish building company. And so it goes on.

Government spending should be controlled and properly accounted for far more than at present. Whilst doing what is necessary to target Benefit fraud (which is only 0.3%), the benefit system should be properly funded for the protection of the weakest and genuinely needy people (remember that the bulk of the Benefit system is taken by old-age pensions).

Without further explanation, I thus endorse both some right-wing and some left-wing policies. I also endorse some policies outside of the current left and right remit.

Thus I support leaving the EU as soon as practicably possible. I have explained why on many occasions. We would prosper without EU regulations set by non-elected officials in Brussels and need to regain our sovereignty over all the issues signed away by various governments. We can easily trade with the EU as many other countries do; European customers are not going to suddenly cease wanting British-made goods like Aston Martin and Rolls Royce cars. The EU is a corrupt, globalist, political aggregation that has not even been able to have its fraudulent accounts successfully audited for decades.

But what are the key issues in Britain to consider at this time? With no apology, this paper concentrates upon the NHS and the shocking facts are simply staggering.²

The NHS

Both the Labour party and the Tory Party have promoted privatisation in the NHS.³ The Lib Dems have colluded in this and therefore cannot be trusted either. How can any party be trusted now?

The Tories promised no top down reform of the NHS⁴ and then did this within two years,⁵ a reformation that has proved to be a vast waste of money and which has created chaos in the management of patients. Indeed, it was the biggest reform ever seen in the NHS. The King's Fund stated that the reforms were '*hugely damaging and distracting*', '*disastrous*' and '*if the government hadn't pursued misguided reforms ... the NHS would be in better shape*'.⁶ The Tories then had to wipe out the previous pledges on websites.⁷

The Tories also promised to ring-fence the NHS budget but then imposed £20 billion of cuts⁸ and a further £10 billion of a lack of investment. Subsequent claims of additional spending were less than inflation at the time and were effectively a cut (see later). This is why the NHS is broke and collapsing; it has been starved of £30 billion in five years by the Coalition.

The NHS is now at the very point of complete collapse and nothing said by the Tories, Labour or the Lib Dems can be trusted.

² I acknowledge a debt to the NHA webpage for suggesting many of these facts.

³ The Labour initiated PFI (Private Financing Initiative) schemes were, and are still, a complete disaster and massively expensive, as well as outsourcing to private firms such as ATOS. PFI was used to build hospitals at a cost of £12.2bn but the NHS must pay back £70.5bn. It would have only cost £17.4bn if the government borrowed the money. [NHS for sale, Prof. Allyson Pollock, 'The great PFI swindle'.] By 2014 the loan cost rose to over £90bn.

⁴ 'There will be no more of the tiresome, meddlesome, top-down re-structures that have dominated the last decade of the NHS.' David Cameron, at the Royal College of Pathologists, 2 November 2009.

⁵ Health and Social Care Act 2012 - 2013.

⁶ BBC News, 'NHS reorganisation was disastrous, says King's Fund', James Gallagher, 6 Feb 2015.

⁷ New Statesman, 'The pre-election pledges that the Tories are trying to wipe from the internet', George Eaton, 13 Nov 2013.

⁸ The Guardian, '£20bn NHS cuts are hitting patients', Denis Campbell & James Meikle, 17 Oct 2011.

For example: GPs

The Tories are promising 7-Day hospital care improvements and more GPs. Neither of these can be introduced even if cash was made available (which it is not).

However, the next five years will see a crisis of GPs leaving surgeries. Why?

Last year the British Medical Association revealed that 57% of GPs were then considering taking early retirement due to their intolerable workload.⁹ This year the BMA surveyed over 15,000 GPs and found the following:

- 34% are considering retiring within the next five years.
- 28% were considering reducing their hours to part-time.
- 9% are considering moving abroad.
- 7% are considering quitting medicine.

The reasons for this were given as:

- Excessive workload – 71%.
- Un-resourced work being moved into general practice – 54%.
- Not enough time with patients – 43%

The BMA stated that this shows the reality of an immediate crisis facing surgeries in the UK. GPs are overworked and frustrated that they do not have enough time with their patients. It also affirmed that the promises being made by political parties were cloud cuckoo land. Nearly half of UK GPs (14,000) are over 50 while there are only 9,000 doctors in training.

Since it takes up to eight years to train a GP it is not possible to even replace these GPs let alone bring in thousands of new ones. Therefore, all promises of additional doctors and late opening surgeries are false.

Nearly 600 surgeries are facing closure in the UK with up to 100 nearing imminent collapse. Already some areas (e.g. East Anglia) are seeing patients have to travel 30 miles to see a doctor. This is why more people are turning up at A and E departments.

So, even without the promises of more GPs and surgeries open all week and at night, Britain faces a crisis of GP numbers. In fact, some parts of the country are already in crisis now and many people cannot get to see a doctor within 14 days and can never get a visit out of hours.

Some facts about the current crisis in the NHS

I could literally write a long book on this subject, so vast is the damage being done to the NHS, which is why it is on the verge of collapse. Also, the government has told lie upon lie about this matter. However, I will limit myself to a few salient points only.

- The cause of rising costs is not increasing demand but massive spending on temporary staff. In fact hospital admissions have fallen since 2010 but the number of temps increased by 16% in 2013/14 and spending on temps rose by 27%.¹⁰ One reason that the NHS is now dependent upon foreign temp nurses, at great cost, is due to the fact that the Coalition cut nursing training places. British people wanted to get into nursing training but were unable, forcing the NHS to employ foreign temporary staff.

⁹ ITV News; ‘57% of GPs thinking about early retirement’, 24 March 2014.

¹⁰ The Health Foundation, ‘A mountain to climb for NHS finances’, Anita Charlesworth, 7 April 2015.

- The Health and Social Care Act removed the government's responsibility to provide comprehensive health care. Most people are completely unaware of this. It also opened up the NHS to competition¹¹ (this was the way an earlier Tory government opened up the way for Royal Mail to be eventually privatised). This Act, which is actually about destroying the public NHS and selling it off in parcels, has cost the taxpayer £3 billion.
- The government has presided over losses in the NHS of £5 billion due to the unnecessary NHS internal market;¹² £3 billion due to the cost of the Lansley reorganisation; plus millions spent on staff redundancies then re-hiring them¹³ and paying for agency staff,¹⁴ millions wasted everyday on PFI loans,¹⁵ and millions lost to private suppliers.
- NHS spending on management consultants has doubled to £640 million a year under the Tories.¹⁶ So much for their claim to reduce management costs.
- The number of NHS managers being paid the equivalent of more than £300,000 a year has doubled in the last 12 months. Some managers are paid £620,000 pa.¹⁷
- Under the Tory led Coalition, 8,000 beds have been axed; 8,000 specialist nurses have been cut; 250,000 NHS staff are now on zero hours contracts; one third of NHS walk in centres have been closed or downgraded; 62 maternity or A&E wards have been shut down; A&E waiting times are the worst in ten years; £16bn of NHS contracts have been offered to the private sector; 1.6 million admissions to private hospitals are now funded by the NHS every year; the health service is now the private sector's biggest customer. We will examine these in more detail.
- The NHS is not unaffordable, it is simply underfunded as a result of Tory ideological cuts.¹⁸ NHS funding is the lowest of G7 countries and is not a drag on the economy, but boosts it.¹⁹

Privatisation under the Coalition

84% of all voters, and even 77% of Tory voters, want the NHS run by the public sector; only 7% want it privatised.²⁰

Despite government lies, privatisation is well under way. This was begun by Labour and has accelerated under the Coalition. All three major parties are thus acting in opposition to the will of the people and cannot be trusted. Francis Maude even openly stated that hospitals and fire services were to be run '*outside the public sector*'.²¹

¹¹ 38 Degrees, 'NHS expert legal advice'.

¹² The Health Select Committee noted that the internal market increased administration costs from 5% to 14% of total NHS budget.

¹³ Nearly 4,000 staff were made redundant by the Lansley reforms and given payouts of av. £43,000, but were then re-hired.

¹⁴ Since 2010 this has cost £5.5bn. [Mirror, 'NHS blows £5.5billion on private agency workers', Vincent Moss, 1 Nov 2014.]

¹⁵ NHS hospitals owe £80bn loan unitary charges. [New Statesman, 'To save the NHS, Labour must face the ugly truth of PFI debts', Benedict Cooper, 10 July 2014.]

¹⁶ The Guardian, 'NHS bill for management advisers doubles', Denis Campbell, 9 Dec 2014.

¹⁷ The Telegraph, 'The rise of the £300,000 NHS fatcats', Laura Donnelly, 27 Dec 2014.

¹⁸ BMJ, Data Briefing, 2011:343.

¹⁹ Globalisation and Health, Research, 'Does investment in the health service sector promote or inhibit economic growth?', Aaron Reeves et. al.

²⁰ YouGov Class Survey; 28 Oct 2013.

²¹ The Telegraph, article now removed.

The Tories sold off the NHS blood supply unit to a disreputable company. This was sold off on 18 July 2013 with no coverage in the media. The recipient of Plasma Resources UK was Bain Capital, an American private equity fund that had received criticism in the US for shady practices.²²

A third of NHS contracts have gone to the private sector since the reorganisation took effect in 2014.²³

An Oxford Economics study shows that outsourcing has almost doubled between 2010 to 2013 from £6.9bn to £12.2bn.²⁴

The Tories signed the largest privatisation deal in history worth £780 million with half of the work going to firms linked with the Tories and three of which have been previously criticised for providing poor care.²⁵

Private firms are on course to get £9bn of NHS contracts.²⁶

A contract worth £5bn is being advertised by NHS England to provide commissioning support services (administration and purchasing). Bidders include an arms dealer, and Indian call centre company, and disgraced companies G4S and Serco.²⁷

Space forbids me giving more evidence on this point.

The cynical ideology, problems and corruption of privatisation of NHS.

The point here is that the privatisation of the NHS to make it like the American system is an ideological fad of the Tories that hate it, despite it being vastly cheaper than the American system and far better. The American hospital system ranks 38th in the world but is the most expensive. Privatisation does not work, costs more and is open to corruption.

One NHS contract²⁸ was awarded to a private firm (Alliance Medical), that had a Tory MP on their board, despite a rival NHS consortium bid being £7 million cheaper.²⁹

A private health company (Cirice) abandoned running Hinchingbrooke Hospital only three years into a ten-year contract as it wasn't making enough money and it received a damning Care Quality Commission report; the first ever hospital to be rated inadequate in patient care.³⁰

BUPA pulled out of a £235 million orthopaedic contract in Worthing after an impact assessment showed that it could put vital hospital services at risk.³¹

²² Hostile take-overs, leveraged buyouts (borrowing to buy a company then putting the debt on that company), asset stripping, tax-dodging and giving American jobs to China.

²³ BBC News, 'A third of NHS contracts awarded to private firms – report', Michelle Roberts, 10 Dec 2014.

²⁴ The BMJ, 'Health services outsourced to private sector', 10 Feb 2015.

²⁵ Mirror, 'Half of private firms behind NHS privatisation have links to Tories', Andrew Gregory, 17 March 2015.

²⁶ The Guardian, 'Private firms on course to net £9bn of NHS contracts', Denis Campbell, 19 Nov 2014.

²⁷ Mirror, 'Revealed: the 21 private firms from India, Japan and America targeting £1bn NHS contract to manage patient medical reports', Andrew Gregory, 20 Nov 2014.

²⁸ Cancer scans in the North West.

²⁹ BuzzFeed News, 'NHS contract awarded to private firm', Solomon Hughes, 27 Jan 2015.

³⁰ The Guardian, 'Inadequate Hinchingbrooke hospital to be put in special measures', Denis Campbell, 9 Jan 2015.

³¹ The Argus, 'BUPA CSH pulls out of West Sussex MSK contract negotiations', Siobhan Ryan, 26 Jan 2015.

In Nottingham NHS services were cut after doctors quit their jobs rather than work for the private firm in control.³²

It is a myth that private healthcare is superior to the NHS. Between October 2010 and April 2014, 802 patients died unexpectedly in private hospitals and there were 921 serious injuries.³³ In 2012-13, 6000 patients were admitted to NHS hospitals for complications that occurred in a private hospital, half were emergencies.³⁴

Services provided by Serco overcharged the NHS by millions.³⁵

In Cambridgeshire nearly a million pounds was wasted on a contract tendering process since it went to the NHS in the end.³⁶

Hospital bosses waste £62 million a year bidding against each other for NHS contracts.³⁷

Thousands of patients are at risk from NHS outsourcing after a damning report on private cataract operations.³⁸

We could add so much more; such as the '*failed experiment*' of a private company running Cornwall's cottage hospitals or the collapse caused by private firm Concordia Health pulling out of running Kent GP practices leaving thousands of patients in the lurch.

The Tories, supported by the Lib Dems, have wrecked the NHS just as they said they would in writing and orally prior to the 2010 election.³⁹

Links between MPs and private healthcare

Half of the private firms involved in NHS privatisation have links to Tories.⁴⁰ A full list is available in The Mirror, 17 November 2014.⁴¹ Among these are David Cameron, Andrew Lansley, David Davis, Iain Duncan Smith, Michael Fallon, Liam Fox, William Hague, Philip Hammond, Sajid Javid, Oliver Letwin, Peter Lilley, Francis Maude, Andrew Mitchell, George Osborne, John Redwood, Malcolm Rifkind, David Willetts, Simon Hughes, Maria Miller, Jeremy Hunt, Nick Clegg and Vince Cable.

³² The Independent, 'NHS services cut in Nottingham', Charlie Cooper, 17 December 2014.

³³ Centre for Health and the Public Interest, 'New report highlights patient safety risks in private hospitals', 20 Aug 2014.

³⁴ The Telegraph, article removed.

³⁵ The Independent, 'Exclusive: Services provider established by outsourcing giant Serco overcharged NHS by millions', Richard Whittell & Emily Dugan, 27 Aug 2014.

³⁶ BBC News, 'Cambridgeshire's £800 NHS bid process unnecessary', 1 Oct 2014.

³⁷ Mirror, 'Hospital bosses waste almost £62 million a year', Vincent Moss, 26 Oct 2014.

³⁸ The Independent, 'Thousands of patients at risk from NHS outsourcing', Charlie Cooper, 17 Oct 2014.

³⁹ See the book written by Jeremy Hunt and Daniel Hannon, 'Direct Democracy' (2005). Hunt calls for a USA type of universal insurance. Hunt called the NHS, the 'National Sickness Service'. Hannon called the NHS a '60-year mistake'. In 2004 Tory MP Oliver Letwin bragged to a private meeting that the Tories would destroy the NHS 'within five years' of getting back into power' [The Independent; Andy McSmith, 19 March 2014].

⁴⁰ Mirror, 'Half of private firms behind NHS privatisation have links to Tories', Andrew Gregory, 17 March 2015.

⁴¹ Mirror, 'Selling off NHS for profit: full list of MPs', Jack Blanchard, 17 Nov 2014.

The more the NHS is privatised, the more Tory and Lib Dem MPs make money on ‘providing firm’ boards. One in five Coalition MPs have links with private firms who could profit from the NHS reforms.⁴²

£1.5bn has left the NHS and gone to private companies linked to 23 Tory MPs and Lords who voted in the Health and Social Care Act.⁴³

Decline of services under the Coalition

Staffing

Despite claims that the number of nursing posts increased, the facts are that they fell from 317,370 in May 2010 to 315,525 in December 2014.⁴⁴ Under the Tories the NHS has axed 4,000 senior nurses⁴⁵ and cut training posts.⁴⁶ Training places were cut from 20,829 in 2010 to 17,219 in 2013 to save money. This is despite 226,400 applying last year (over 10 per place).⁴⁷ This forces payment of temp staff at up to four times the cost – what insanity is this?

Thus the NHS has to recruit one in four nurses from abroad.⁴⁸ The NHS now spends £1,200 a minute on nurses because of government cuts.⁴⁹ The chaos and stress has led to nurses being at breaking point as the number of those off work with stress has soared.⁵⁰ Nearly two thirds of nurses are now considering quitting.⁵¹

The shortage of nurses, due to government cuts, is putting lives at risk.⁵² The Royal College of Nursing estimates that the NHS needs 20,000 more nurses. Some hospitals have up to 16% of their nursing posts vacant.⁵³

Like GPs, nurses are emigrating to better jobs overseas.⁵⁴

One in five health workers have taken a second job because they cannot survive on their NHS salary and half of staff are overdrawn every month.⁵⁵

Treatments

Routine operations now have the worst waiting times since 2008.⁵⁶

Cancer waiting times have been missed throughout 2014.⁵⁷

⁴² Mirror, ‘Selling off NHS for profit’, Jack Blanchard, 17 Nov 2014.

⁴³ The Guardian, ‘Companies with links to Tories have won £1.5bn worth of NHS contracts’, Matthew Taylor, 3 October 2014.

⁴⁴ BBC News, ‘Next government should take immediate action to boost nurse numbers’, 12 April 2015.

⁴⁵ Mirror, ‘Shock new figures reveal NHS has axed 4,000 senior nurses’, Andrew Gregory, 11 Mar 2014.

⁴⁶ The Telegraph, article removed.

⁴⁷ The Guardian, ‘The strike is a symptom of an NHS in intensive care’, Polly Toynbee, 13 Oct 2014.

⁴⁸ The Guardian, ‘NHS has to recruit one in four nurses from abroad’, Daniel Boffey, 4 April 2015.

⁴⁹ Mirror, ‘Crisis-hit hospitals MUST hire more nurses warns the head of the NHS’, Andrew Gregory, 18 Feb 2015.

⁵⁰ The Guardian, ‘Nurses at breaking point as number off work with stress soars’, Ashley Kirk, 17 Jan 2015.

⁵¹ Mirror, ‘NHS crisis: nurse morale hits rock bottom’, Danny Buckland, 6 Sept 2014.

⁵² The Guardian, ‘Hospitals need thousands of extra nurses or patients safety will be at risk’, Denis Campbell & Nicholas Watt, 9 May 2014.

⁵³ The Guardian, ‘Hospitals need thousands of extra nurses or patients safety will be at risk’, Denis Campbell & Nicholas Watt, 9 May 2014.

⁵⁴ The Guardian, ‘The strike is a symptom of an NHS in intensive care’, Polly Toynbee, 13 Oct 2014.

⁵⁵ Mirror, ‘Health workers forced to take second jobs’, Alan Jones, 11 Oct 2014.

⁵⁶ BBC News, ‘GP workload harming care’, Nick Triggle, 9 April 2015.

Many operations (such as hip, knees and cataracts, varicose veins, tonsils) are being rationed and are no longer available for free in certain parts of the country.⁵⁸ Elderly people are having to go without and live in pain.

Beds

English hospitals have lost 5 beds for every day the Coalition have been in power.⁵⁹

Over 25 years successive governments have closed over 50% of NHS beds. In 2013 there were 135,000 but in 1987 there were 297,000.⁶⁰ England now has one of the lowest numbers of beds in Europe and the highest bed occupancy. Some hospitals are at over 100%, which means that patients are being placed into specialist wards or surgical wards, leading to cancelled surgery, increased waiting times and greater risk of infections.⁶¹

More than 300 patients a day are having operations cancelled due to increasing pressure on beds.⁶²

Cuts to social care have led to unsustainable levels of bed-blocking with thousands of patients taking up hospital beds because they have nowhere else to go.⁶³

Social care

Under this government 250,000 people have lost their state-funded help with carrying out everyday activities, such as bathing, dressing and eating as council budgets have been slashed.⁶⁴ 40% government cuts to local councils leave one million elderly people without basic social care.⁶⁵ Adult Social Care has faced a cut of 12% while demand for services has risen by 14%.⁶⁶

Social Care is facing a shortfall of £4.3bn a year by 2020.⁶⁷

Two-thirds of frontline care workers receive less than the living wage. 10% are paid less than the minimum wage illegally.⁶⁸

Thousands of older chronically ill people could lose out on publicly funded social care under new eligibility rules after May.⁶⁹

Nine out of ten care homes and hospitals in England are failing people with dementia.⁷⁰ By next year there will be 850,000 people with dementia.⁷¹

⁵⁷ The Independent, 'NHS missed cancer waiting times targets throughout 2014', Charlie Cooper, 18 Feb 2015.

⁵⁸ The Green Benches, Dr Eoin Clarke, '21 NHS treatments that are no longer free ... in 100+ parts of England', 27 Sept 2013. BBC News, 'Key NHS operations being rationed', Nick Triggle, 6 Dec 2013.

⁵⁹ Mirror, article lost.

⁶⁰ The Guardian, 'Why A&E departments are fighting for their life', Allyson Pollock, 14 Jan 2014.

⁶¹ The Guardian, 'Why A&E departments are fighting for their life', Allyson Pollock, 14 Jan 2014.

⁶² Politics Homes, 'Rise in shelved NHS operations', Matt Fraser, 20 Jan 2015.

⁶³ The Independent, 'English A&Es reach breaking point', Charlie Cooper, 19 Dec 2014.

⁶⁴ The Guardian, 'Cuts have left 25,000 older people without state care', Patrick Butler, 26 Mar 2014.

⁶⁵ The Independent, 'A million elderly people lack basic social care', Charlie Cooper, & Hannah Fearn 12 Apr 2015.

⁶⁶ The Guardian, 'Adult care services at breaking point', David Brindle, 2 July 2014.

⁶⁷ Association of Adult Social Services. Local Gvt. Assoc. 'Adult social care funding: 2014 state of the nation report'.

⁶⁸ The Guardian, 'Wealth creators are robbing our most productive people', George Monbiot, 31 Mar 2015.

⁶⁹ The Guardian, 'Cuts have left 25,000 older people without state care', Patrick Butler, 26 Mar 2014.

Children

The UK has one of the highest rates of death for children under five in Western Europe.⁷²

A leading obstetrician warns that there is a possible link between high baby mortality rate in England and a shortage of staff in maternity care and labour wards.⁷³

Mental health

The Coalition has cut mental health budgets by 8%, which is what has caused the current crisis.⁷⁴ There are 3,640 fewer nurses and 213 fewer doctors working in mental health compared with two years ago.⁷⁵

75% of people with mental health problems get no help at all.⁷⁶

Due to the lack of mental health beds available in some areas, people (including teenagers) are being sent hundreds of miles away – which adds to their distress.⁷⁷ Some teenagers have been kept in police cells, as there were no beds.⁷⁸ The loss of mental health beds under the Coalition has been linked to eight deaths.⁷⁹ GPs have stated that the cuts to these services have left mental health care unable to cope.⁸⁰

Mental illness accounts for over a fifth of NHS disease.⁸¹

A quarter of the prison population has mental health issues. Some of these have killed people because they did not get necessary medication.⁸² Keeping a person in prison costs about £40,000 a year; a third of the cost of a private health care bed.⁸³

Self-harm by mental health patients in the NHS has risen by 56%.⁸⁴

The cost for gaps in mental health care for new mothers is £8bn a year.⁸⁵

⁷⁰ The Guardian, ‘Patchy dementia care puts patients at risk’, Haroon Siddique, 13 Oct 2014.

⁷¹ Alzheimer’s Society, ‘Dementia UK: update’.

⁷² BBC News, ‘Under fives death rate high in UK’, 2 May 2014.

⁷³ The Guardian, ‘NHS understaffing may have an effect on baby mortality rate’, Denis Campbell, 27 Apr 2014.

⁷⁴ BBC News, ‘Mental health service budgets cut by 8%’, Michael Buchanan, 20 Mar 2015.

⁷⁵ The Guardian, ‘UK’s mentally ill people more likely to be found in jail than hospital’, Randeep Ramesh, 13 Nov 2014.

⁷⁶ BBC News, ‘Mental health service budgets cut by 8%’, Michael Buchanan, 20 Mar 2015.

⁷⁷ The Guardian, ‘NHS mental health care pushed to breaking point by lack of beds’, Haroon Siddique & James Meikle, 1 Feb 2015,

⁷⁸ The Independent, ‘Girl, 16, with mental health problems held in police cells’, Lamiat Sabin, 29 Nov 2014.

⁷⁹ Express, ‘Exclusive: loss of mental health beds is linked to eight deaths’, Danny Buckland, 30 Nov 2014.

⁸⁰ The Independent, ‘Sharp cuts leave NHS mental health services unable to cope’, Charlie Cooper, 30 July 2014.

⁸¹ The Guardian, Editorial, 12 August 2014.

⁸² The Guardian, ‘UK’s mentally ill people more likely to be found in jail than hospital’, Randeep Ramesh, 13 Nov 2014.

⁸³ The Guardian, ‘UK’s mentally ill people more likely to be found in jail than hospital’, Randeep Ramesh, 13 Nov 2014.

⁸⁴ The Guardian, ‘Self-harm by mental health patients in the NHS has risen by 56%’, Denis Campbell, 27 Aug 2014.

⁸⁵ The Guardian, ‘Gaps in mental health care for new mothers costs £8bn a year’, Peter Walker, 20 October 2014.

Budgets

Note: the NHS is the cheapest health service of all G7 countries. The UK spends less on health care than most nations.⁸⁶

Tories claim to have increased NHS spending by £12.7bn but spending has only increased by 0.8%; i.e. because they did not factor in inflation as originally promised the increase was only £5bn since 2010. Add to this the rising immigration levels plus 30% cuts to local councils and you have the NHS crisis.⁸⁷

Over half of £10.8bn savings was made by underpaying staff (£1.7bn) or ‘tariff efficiency’ (£4.8bn) which amounts to staffing cuts since staffing comprises 70% of hospital costs.⁸⁸

Proposed NHS hospital funding changes may lead to avoidable deaths.⁸⁹

Spending on cancer care has reduced since 2009-10.⁹⁰

All (25) NHS Acute Trusts are now in the red apart from four.⁹¹

Funding for GPs is down by £943 million, breaking a former government pledge.⁹²

Equipment

Patients are being told that they will only get one hearing aid when they need two.⁹³

A & E

Waiting times are at their worst in a decade.⁹⁴

Dozens of maternity and A&E units have been closed or downgraded.⁹⁵

Ambulances

Ambulances are repeatedly unable to drop off patients due to logjam in emergency departments.⁹⁶

The shortage of ambulances has meant that the police are regularly having to take people to hospital.⁹⁷ In one case the police took a dying three-year old girl to hospital after the ambulance failed to arrive.⁹⁸

There are not enough ambulances to cope and many paramedics are quitting their jobs.⁹⁹

⁸⁶ BMJ, ‘UK spending on healthcare lowest of G7 countries’, 2014;348:g3063.

⁸⁷ The Guardian, ‘The NHS needs more money’, Polly Toynbee, 26 Mar 2015. The Independent, ‘David Cameron’s numbers problem ... the Tories can’t get their figures straight’, Adam Withnall, 31 Mar 2015.

⁸⁸ The Independent, ‘Government’s reorganisation of the NHS was its biggest mistake’, Ian Johnston, 13 Oct 2014.

⁸⁹ BBC News, ‘Proposed NHS hospital funding changes may lead to avoidable deaths’, 24 Dec 2014.

⁹⁰ The Guardian, ‘Cancer services weakened by coalition’s NHS shake up’, Denis Campbell, 8 Sep 2014.

⁹¹ The Independent, ‘Government’s reorganisation of the NHS was its biggest mistake’, Ian Johnston, 13 Oct 2014.

⁹² The Guardian, ‘Doctors accuse Coalition of huge cut in spending on surgeries’, Denis Campbell, 3 Oct 2013.

⁹³ Daily Mail, ‘Now hearing aids are rationed by our crisis-stricken NHS’, Jenny Hope, 10 Feb 2015.

⁹⁴ BBC News, ‘A&E waiting in England hits new worst level’, Nick Triggle, 7 April 2015.

⁹⁵ Telegraph, ‘The list of 66 A&E and maternity units being hit by cuts’, Laura Donnelly, 26 Oct 2014.

⁹⁶ Mirror, ‘A&E is creaking under pressure admits NHS boss’, Andrew Gregory, 16 Dec 2014.

⁹⁷ BBC News, ‘Police covering for East Midlands ambulance service paramedics’, 22 Dec 2014.

⁹⁸ Telegraph, ‘Police took dying girl aged three to hospital’, Patrick Sawer, 30 Nov 2014.

Hospitals now frequently rely upon paying private ambulances to do work. NHS spending on this has doubled regarding 999 calls alone.¹⁰⁰ London spending on private ambulances has risen tenfold.¹⁰¹

Some patients have been left stranded in an ambulance for 8 hours.¹⁰²

As a result of a lack of ambulances, people are dying unnecessarily.¹⁰³

GPs

During 2013-14, 34 million people failed to be able to book a GP appointment.¹⁰⁴

Funding for general practice has fallen from its normal level of 11% of the NHS budget to 8.5%.¹⁰⁵

The number of GPs leaving the UK to work abroad has doubled under the Coalition.¹⁰⁶

It has been stated that GP services are under the threat of extinction due to increasing workload, dwindling budgets and lack of doctors.¹⁰⁷ The government has created a GP recruitment crisis.¹⁰⁸ Half of surgeries say that waiting time for appointments will exceed two weeks due to unprecedeted workloads.¹⁰⁹ GPs account for 90% of patient contact but just 8% of the NHS budget.

Conclusion

We could show similar declines of standards for cancer care, diabetes and many other specialisms. There is no doubt that the Coalition has caused the worse crisis in the NHS' history and the lack of funding has damaged the economy.

Aside: Note that the stupid HS2 railway scheme has been proved to be without value to the economy (why would getting to Birmingham from London 20 minutes quicker boost the economy?). This will cost £50 billion.¹¹⁰ Also the improvement / replacement to the Trident nuclear deterrent would cost nearly as much. Facing an NHS imminent collapse, I know where I would like to see that money spent.

⁹⁹ BBC News, 'More paramedics quitting NHS jobs', James Melley, 9 Oct 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Telegraph, 'NHS spending doubles on private ambulances', Laura Donnelly, 9 April 2014.

¹⁰¹ BBC News, 'London spending on private ambulances grows tenfold', 22 October 2014.

¹⁰² Telegraph, 'Patients left stranded in ambulances for 8 hours', Laura Donnelly, 9 Aug 2014.

¹⁰³ Mirror, 'Pensioner dies after ambulance takes two hours to arrive despite seven 999 calls', Paul Byrne et. al., 22 April 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Mirror, 'NHS crisis: 34 million failed bids to book GP', Andrew Gregory, 1 April 2015.

¹⁰⁵ GP, 'Viewpoint: Dr Kailish Chand: Increase general practice spend to 11% of NHS budget', Kailish Chand, 9 Mar 2015.

¹⁰⁶ The Guardian, 'Number of GPs seeking to leave UK...', Daniel Boffey, 23 Nov 2014.

¹⁰⁷ The Guardian, 'Family doctor service on brink of extinction says new GP leader', Denis Campbell, 22 Mar 2014.

¹⁰⁸ The Guardian, 'GP numbers tumble in England as recruitment crisis bites', Toby Helm & Denis Campbell, 14 June 2014.

¹⁰⁹ The Guardian, 'GP numbers tumble in England as recruitment crisis bites', Toby Helm & Denis Campbell, 14 June 2014.

¹¹⁰ BBC News, 'HS2: Government has no convincing case for £50bn rail line', Christ Johnston, 25 Mar 2015.

The irony: healthcare spending improves economic growth!

Study after study has shown that proper healthcare funding leads to a healthier nation and a healthier nation leads to greater prosperity and less time off work. Underfunding the NHS is a contributory factor in damaging the economy.¹¹¹

We are slowly losing the world's best healthcare system

International experts affirm that the UK's NHS is the best health care system in the world. The UK is even better than other countries that invest more than the UK.¹¹² The privatised American system is ranked as the worst. Yet the Tories are determined to eradicate the NHS and replace it with an American system (so that they can profit from private health firms!).

The economy

We need to explain the national debt.

There are two parts to our debt, which we can illustrate as being similar to a household's current account (revenue account) and a housing mortgage (capital account).

The revenue account is what we need in order to pay for what we spend on a yearly basis. At the moment we are spending more than we earn through tax, and this is called the deficit (consider it as an overdraft).

It is true that the Coalition slimmed down this deficit, but not by very much. Remember that they originally promised to solve this problem by now but they are years away from doing so. However, what they do not mention is that the capital debt is far higher than in 2010.

The figures

The Tories boast about being the party of fiscal responsibility and economic recovery. While it is true that Labour wasted huge amounts, wrongly bolstered up banking frauds with tax-payers' money and left a £900 billion national debt, the truth is that the Tories have performed far worse.

In fact they have done such a bad job that in five years they added more debt to the country than Labour did in 13 years.

Labour left a national debt of £750 billion plus a 'overdraft' (current account deficit) on the revenue account of £150 billion, totalling £900bn.

The Coalition has left us with a national debt of £1.6 trillion. In other words double the amount when they came to office. They cut down the revenue deficit to £90 billion by selling off the household silver (such as Royal Mail – something that will cost the country in the future¹¹³ – and Eurostar), and also by adding gambling and prostitution to national

¹¹¹ Globalisation and health, Open Access Research: 'Does investment in the health sector promote or inhibit economic growth?', Aaron Reeves et.al. 2013:9:43.

¹¹² The Guardian, 'NHS comes top in healthcare survey', Denis Campbell & Nicholas Watt, 17 June 2014.

¹¹³ This is important. The government sold the business operation of Royal Mail but had to keep the responsibility for the Post Office pension scheme. This gives the private firm an unfair advantage. To make more profit this firm is now laying off postal staff like there is no tomorrow. They will obviously replace expensive long-term delivery officers with poorly trained low-paid part-time or zero-hours contract staff and make huge profits. Any other corporation would have to balance this with redundancy payments and pensions, but the government has to pay these. So, the already stretched and in-deficit Post Office pension scheme (caused by being robbed by the treasury) will require tax-payers' money to cover the tens of thousands of planned redundancies and pensions coming soon (my own postman is being made redundant

GDP figures – the act of a desperate chancellor. The revenue deficit plus the national debt (capital budget) adds up to £1.6 trillion for 2014-15. The projection made by the Office for Budget Responsibility shows a national debt of nearly £2 trillion by 2018.

The national debt does not include certain figures, such as the money borrowed to bail out the banks that caused the crash in 2008. This is £900 billion. If you add this to the mix, the national debt was £2.2 trillion (130% of output) in 2014 and will be £3 trillion by 2018.

But to this figure must be added the interest bill on this debt, which by 2017 will be over £70 billion. This has to be found every year just to pay the interest not the principal. All this has been while interest rates were at all-time lows. What happens when they rise? If interest rates rose to a normal 5% Britain could never repay its debt. Interest rates are set to rise within a year.

In other words, Britain is flat broke.

Yet Cameron and Osborne believe that if they keep telling the lie that they are paying down the national debt often enough people will believe them. Sadly, many do.

Tax

The Tories boast of being the party of low taxation. Is this true?

Most people do not realise that the Coalition government pushed through 509 new taxes. These included new capital gain taxes, carbon tax, air passenger duties, new fuel taxes and increased VAT, as well as taking taxes from pension funds. More people were also dragged into higher rates of tax.

They boast that they reduced the tax of the low paid. Yet in practice I, living on a modest pension way below the national average income, saw my tax go up.

Savings

The policy of Quantitative Easing has seen a reduction of your personal savings of over 17%.

Two illusions of the Tories

1. The ‘trickle-down effect’.

This is the ideology that if you support the rich, the bankers and the investors through low taxes, low regulation and other measures (such as Quantitative Easing) the prosperity of the super rich will trickle down to all layers of society, creating wealth for all.

Apart from being a foolish and facile policy, historical experience has proved that not only does this not happen, what occurs is that money trickles upwards. The rich get richer, the super rich become fabulously wealthy, the middle class lose purchasing power and the poor become even worse off. This is exactly what has happened under the Coalition government. No one can deny this; the economic figures prove it without any equivocation.

Tory policies make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

despite having 14 years left to do). A by-product will be the appalling chaos of diminished service caused by unmotivated, poorly paid staff. Mark my words, you will also see rural areas robbed of a postman within a few years. These folk will be forced to go to the nearest sorting office to pick up their mail. This is what privatisation means.

2. Austerity measures

The second illusion is that austerity measures help GDP by making government savings. Balance the books by reducing spending.

Again some thinking would show that this is nonsense but again historical evidence shows the reverse. Here (and elsewhere) austerity measures have worsened the economy dramatically.

There are multiple reasons from this.

One of the reasons is that when you sack a lot of people (especially public sector workers), through thinning out employees of the state, you not only reduce your tax base but you also incur many costs, such as early pensions and compensation. You can only cut down the size of the state in a time of boom and prosperity, not in a recession.

When you introduce many jobs on ‘zero hours’ contracts you also reduce your tax base. These jobs are only a hair’s breadth away from slave labour.

When you put people into austerity so that they cannot afford food and rent, you reduce national spending.

When you make draconian changes to the welfare system (such as harsh sanctions), which leave people starving, these people end up in hospital. When working people are so poor they cannot afford food they become sick. Here they not only block beds and cause an unnecessary crisis in the NHS, but they are a great cost. Cutting someone’s benefit may save the DWP £60 a week for a month, but when the person becomes sick and ends up in hospital with malnutrition they cost £5,000 per night. The same thing happens when you cut council social care – the weak elderly end up in hospital with nowhere else to go causing further increased costs.

For these, and many other reasons, austerity measures do not work. They are applied by the Tories for ideological reasons (they hate the Benefit System) not for economic reasons. Since the Tories have presided over a doubling of the national debt, there is no doubt that austerity measures have not boosted the economy at all.

Facts about the fruit of austerity

- Four million British people are now in food poverty.
- 75% of the welfare cuts have been borne by low-income families in work.¹¹⁴
- Hourly pay for 22-29-year olds is lower than any time since 1998.¹¹⁵ Real pay is falling for the 6th year in a row.¹¹⁶ British workers suffer the biggest real-wage fall of major G20 countries.¹¹⁷
- A million English people now rely upon a food bank in order to survive.¹¹⁸ Without food banks many people would have died and many more would have blocked beds in hospitals. Charity is stemming the damage done by government measures.
- A million children are in poverty.

¹¹⁴ TUC, ‘Welfare reforms spectacularly fail’.

¹¹⁵ Resolution Foundation analysis.

¹¹⁶ The Guardian, ‘UK workers hit by sixth year of falling real pay’, Angela Monaghan et. al. 19 Nov 2014.

¹¹⁷ The Guardian, ‘British workers suffer biggest real-wage fall’, Angela Monaghan & Alberto Nardelli, 5 Dec 2014.

¹¹⁸ Trussel Trust.

- The suicide rate has gone through the roof (now including middle-aged people) and this has been directly linked to austerity measures.¹¹⁹ The biggest cause of death for young men is suicide.
- Rents are so expensive and housing so short in supply that Dickensian poverty is now commonplace. For instance multiple people living in every room (up to nine per room) in a house with one toilet. People bed-sharing; that is, one person sleeps in the bed during the day and works at night, then another sleeps at night and works in the day.
- The rich got richer at the expense of hitting the poor.¹²⁰ The government shifted money from the poorest to the rich through welfare cuts and tax reductions.¹²¹

We could add page after page of distressing statistics and stories about the fruit of austerity measures; but there is no space here and I have done that elsewhere.¹²² The damage caused to innocent people by this government is a complete disgrace. Shame on them! But worse than that, they don't even make economic sense.

Economists on austerity measures

Two thirds of economists say that the Coalition austerity has harmed the economy. In fact, even the treasury's own forecaster, the Office for Budget Responsibility, estimates that austerity was a drag on GDP growth in the last five years.¹²³ Furthermore, Cameron's tax cut vow shook the Treasury officials.¹²⁴

The trade deficit is at its lowest level for many years and has been negative throughout the Coalition's term. The latest figures show a deficit of £2.9 billion in February 2015.¹²⁵ The supposed recovery is a phantom based upon artificial stimulants to the housing market, consumer spending and household debt. Osborne promised the recovery would be by an export drive. This has spectacularly failed (as have every Osborne promise¹²⁶).

Income inequality holds back economic growth. The world's leading economic think tank (the OECD) dismissed the concept of the trickle-down effect and affirmed that the UK economy would have been over 20% bigger if the gap between rich and poor had not widened since the 1980s.¹²⁷ In other words, austerity measures and inflating the rich damages the economy. The OECD proposed higher taxes on the rich and policies to improve the lot of the bottom 40% of the population.

The conclusion regarding the economy

The measures taken by the Coalition just do not work. We are now in far more debt than we were in 2010 and the austerity measures have caused terrible hardship and even deaths in society.

By any measure this is wickedness.

¹¹⁹ Report by Dr Carl Walker.

¹²⁰ The Guardian, 'Revealed: how coalition has helped rich by hitting poor', Daniel Boffey, 15 Nov 2014.

¹²¹ The Independent, 'Coalition government has shifted money from poorest to better-off', Lamiat Sabin, 16 Nov 2014.

¹²² Such as, 'Austerity politics: why they are wrong'.

¹²³ The Independent, 'Two thirds of economists say Coalition austerity harmed the economy', Ben Chu, 1 April 2015.

¹²⁴ Financial Times, 12 Nov 2014.

¹²⁵ Office for National Statistics; Summary: UK Trade, Feb 2015.

¹²⁶ For example he missed his deficit target; in August 2014 the treasury expected a £50m surplus; instead ONS data showed borrowing was £9.4bn higher.

¹²⁷ The Guardian, 'Revealed: how the wealth gap holds back economic growth', Larry Elliot, 9 Dec 2014.

Immigration

This, of course, is a very hot potato but any discussion on this is completely pointless.

To try to reduce immigration figures that Tories have adopted draconian measures on immigrants from areas outside the EU. This has meant many personal tragedies, such as the wives and children of British people being forbidden to enter the country. This is a disgrace. Also, detention centres where immigrants of various sorts are kept have failed health and safety standards and have been little more than concentration camps.

Then there are relatives of British people from abroad that have studied here for years, gained high qualifications and have even worked in important jobs – but have then had their visa applications rejected and have been deported. This makes no sense whatsoever.

Regarding immigration from within the EU, there is not a single thing that any politician can do about it. We have signed away this power in a treaty and EU officials have formally stated that they will not allow any room for discussion about this status.

The only way to curtail control over national borders is to leave the EU. That is just a plain fact. Whether you want to do this or not is your own opinion; but you cannot control English borders if you remain in the EU.

Conclusion

Certainly this is going to be an important election and there is some evidence that smaller parties are becoming more favourable; though they still have no chance of altering the two-party status quo.

A key problem is that the Tories and Labour are two peas in a pod. New Labour under Blair was just Thatcherism rejuvenated; New Labour was not left-wing at all. Blair presided over the near death of UK Socialism. But Labour under Ed Milliband (who was part of Blair's government) is really Tory-lite. He is not going to end austerity measures. He is in favour of the EU. He will be unable to do anything about excessive immigration from the EU. Furthermore, he has not even promised as much money for the NHS as the Tories and the Lib Dems. A Labour government would be only a slightly smaller disaster than a Tory government but with a weaker leader. Indeed, a Labour minority government would need SNP support and the effective Nicola Sturgeon would dominate the weaker Milliband.

What can a thinking, responsible person do?

These are the options, as far as I can see.

- Do not vote at all; thus registering your disapproval of the whole system.
- Vote, but spoil your paper; or mark it ‘none of the above’.
- Where possible, vote for a local person of any party that has integrity and who can be trusted.
- Vote for a smaller party if you believe that their general intentions are good for the people, for instance Welsh people may choose to vote for Plaid Cymru in Wales (chiefly fighting to end austerity and get a better budget and devolution for Wales). However, this is risky as even smaller parties that once appeared honest later proved to be far from it. Also they have manifesto aims that present other problems. While the Greens have some good policies, they have many bad ones. Their organisation and leadership

is a shambles and their stewardship of running Brighton council has been a disaster. However, Caroline Lucas MP is a hard worker that speaks much good sense.

- Vote for a new party (where possible) such as the NHA (who are fielding about a dozen candidates). These are people of principle and integrity (mostly doctors) who are, however, standing on a single issue – to save the NHS.

I agree that these options are not very impressive, but this shows the poverty of our failed, unrepresentative democratic scheme and the difficulties caused by our ‘first past the post’ electoral system.

What is certain is that if the Tories regain power, their plan of implementing £60 billion more austerity cuts¹²⁸ (£12bn in the DWP alone and over £20bn savings in the NHS) would eradicate the health service, ruin local councils (some are already close to bankruptcy), destroy local infrastructure and bring Britain’s social structure to its knees. Public spending is already at 1936 levels after one term of power. That the Lib Dems have colluded in this in order to hold power will be the reason why their public confidence will be decimated at the next election.

These are some key facts to consider. What you choose to do is up to you.

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¹²⁸ The Guardian, ‘Osborne moves to cut spending to 1930s levels’, Patrick Wintour & Larry Elliot, 4 Dec 2014.