

DEFEND PUBLIC HEALTHCARE

"That's the standard technique of privatization: defund, make sure things don't work, people get angry, you hand it over to private capital." — Noam Chomsky.

Chomsky's quote encapsulates the method that premier Doug Ford is using to privatize healthcare and education in Ontario. He is cutting core funding, forcing real wage cuts on healthcare workers and withholding needed emergency funding, despite sitting on almost \$3 billion in surplus cash.

The reality is, Ford and the Tories don't want to fix the public system at all. They want it to fall apart so that they can justify privatized services which will erode the public system and result in for-profit healthcare like we see in the US.

He is not the first Premier to do so. Over the years successive Liberal, Tory and NDP governments have underfunded the system. What is different now is that the COVID crisis provides Ford - and Premiers across Canada - with a cover for their plans. The crisis in the system can be blamed on external factors rather than deliberate policy decisions.

This is the most unprecedented attack on the public system that

we have seen.

The main beneficiaries of Ford's plan are the corporate health providers that will make billions as they take over certain services. Healthcare and education are coveted by corporations because they are necessities. People will pay exorbitant fees for care if they are either dying or watching someone die. As well,

but came about because of a decades-long fight. The first publicly funded plan was introduced by Tommy Douglass in Saskatchewan but it would not have become the law of the land without a struggle. Trade unions, community members and healthcare workers organized and marched in their thousands to win a public system.



the subsidies paid by taxpayer cash are a profit guarantee. It is the goose that lays the golden egg and the corporations want it all to themselves.

How did we get here?

Healthcare was not gifted to us by a benevolent federal government

its role in privatizing services as well. It was Dalton McGuinty who froze healthcare funding at the behest of Don Drummond who was hired to find ways to balance the books in Ontario. Drummond led an anti-democratic consultation with bank and health care corporate executives and laid out a plan to starve the public system.

Under Ford this has reached a new level. His cuts have been systematic and are designed to create a crisis in the system. Bill 124, which capped salary increases for all public sector workers at 1% has led to staffing shortages. Given levels of inflation, these salaries are not keeping up and are forcing people out of the healthcare professions.

Public funds for private corporations

He is also using public funds to subsidize services being carried out by private corporations.

He and health minister, Sylvia Jones insist that people will only need their health cards to get care but what he fails to mention is that the services are still privatized and public money is still being given to the private sector. The public system is still being eroded through these processes.

From the first moment of implementation there has been pressure from corporate interests to defund certain services. It was pressure from the rich that scuttled plans for universal dental care and pharmaceuticals.

The previous Liberal government in Ontario played

The announcement of \$20 million to run MRI labs in 27 small rural hospitals is another signal that Ford is courting private investment in key medical assets. The province, on the advice of McKinsey & Co., hopes to sell off the future income stream of OHIP payments to corporations willing to put up the private capital needed to buy the MRI machines and run the labs. While it appears to be a win for people served locally it comes at a higher price than if the equipment is owned by the hospital. Corporations that make the \$5 million plus investment in an MRI are not doing this out of benevolence but because they are guaranteed to be paid the actual costs plus the added cost of a profit. Profit is generally rationalized as a reward for the risk taken, but in this case, there is no risk.

Reforms and Capitalism

This process of underfunding and then shifting services to the private sector is going on around the world. Under the policies of the neoliberal economic models,

cuts to the public sector are demanded as a means to balance budgets. This remains a central preoccupation for the international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank which demand cuts to secure loans.

In most advanced capitalist states, the same process can be seen at work. In the UK, cuts to the NHS have resulted in a broken system and labour revolt among

nurses being squeezed by the cost of living crisis.

This is not an aberration or just a product of neoliberal policies but is a central dynamic in the capitalist system which values profit above all else - including human needs.

And the profits generated by selling off necessary public services are enormous. The ruling class will not simply sit back and

watch the opportunity for billions in profits go unclaimed.

This profit motive is behind the cuts and the privatization processes we see. We will never finish this fight while the capitalist system remains in place.

Working class

Increasingly people are realizing that we cannot reform a rotten system. But we are also seeing the alternatives on display. The recent fight by education workers in Ontario is a case in point. The workers defied a forced contract and back to work legislation by striking in their tens of thousands. The power of the working class to shift the terrain and build a better world themselves can be seen in their fight. The struggle opened up new possibilities for a fightback.

The defeat of Ford on bill 28 has broadened the horizons of millions of people who want to fight. But we will only win this fight completely when we are rid of the capitalist system which pursues profit above the lives of working people.



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