

# The doctor's strike is about an economic system that is...

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Wes Streeting has chosen to write for [The Daily Telegraph](#) today, condemning the doctors' strike. Doing so, he says he will ensure that non-consultant grade doctors are worse off than they would have been if they had not gone on strike. The vindictiveness of Labour is apparent.

He has also said elsewhere that the strike will ensure that private provision comes to the NHS sooner than it might otherwise have done. His real goal is clear.

In other comments, he said that doctors who are striking are undermining the union movement. But how can that be, when the doctors' union met every one of the stringent requirements to ensure that this strike was legitimate?

And what Streeting is also doing is playing games with data on doctors' pay.

It is undoubtedly true that new doctors start on £38,000 a year.

What Streeting is not saying is that large numbers of them cannot now get a job, because he is ensuring that there is no funding to guarantee those who have been trained as doctors a place in the NHS. That is entirely down to his incompetence.

He is also suggesting that by the time they are approaching consultant grade, they might earn £100,000 a year — but only as a consequence of top-up payments for weekend working, night working, working six days a week, and generally not having a life at all, which adds approximately £20,000 a year on top of their base salary when they reach this stage, most likely in their late 30s, which is £74,000 per annum.

What Streeting also fails to mention is that he is not funding progression to consultant level. In other words, he is leaving resident doctors stuck on lower grades of pay.

He also fails to mention the exceptional levels of student debt that doctors have.

And he forgets to mention the fact that doctors have to pay for a lot of their own equipment and their own postgraduate training, which is almost unknown anywhere

else.

In other words, Streeting is playing a game of prejudice, and I sincerely hope he loses.

However, let me stand back from this and ask why this dispute is really happening, because it is that which Streeting so obviously fails to understand, as he always does, because he settled long ago on a career path which will reward him with significantly more than a doctor might ever enjoy, but almost certainly with less social benefit. He would suggest that his reward is for his superior intellectual capacity. I would argue that he displays none.

The reality is that this dispute revolves around three key issues.

The first is austerity, because, however the figures are interpreted, doctors are most emphatically worse off now than they were in 2010. Streeting cannot deny that, any more than he can deny that he is an arch proponent of austerity as an economic policy, based on his hatred of the state sector and all it does, which he shares with almost all his Labour Cabinet colleagues. There is, then, an ideological element to this dispute which cannot be denied.

Second, for each doctor, there is, however, something more fundamental than that. If we presume that a doctor reaches a salary — including all the extra payments for antisocial hours and everything else — of something around £70,000 by their early 30s (and that might be optimistic), then it is likely that they might then have borrowing capacity for a mortgage of between £280,000 and £350,000. In other words, in some parts of England, they might be able to buy an averagely priced property. But of course, that means that in very large parts of England, they will be able to do no such thing. And it is entirely unreasonable to think that a professional person must be in a relationship to be able to afford a home, and yet even successful doctors are now likely to be in that position in many parts of England.

To put this another way, these doctors are striking because they know they are being exploited.

They know that they are being exploited by the property market and all those within it — including landlords, but most especially banks and the Bank of England, and also the UK government that is permitting interest rates to be set at far too high a level.

They also know that they are being exploited by all the other monopolies — including those deliberately sanctioned by the state — who charge them excessive prices for everything from their commute, to the cost of their mobile phone, to utility bills, and so much else.

Although I suspect few doctors will put it as bluntly as this, this dispute is about the fact that they know the economic system they are working in is totally failing them and

denying them any chance to flourish. And that is where Streeting's responsibility lies.

Third, they will see that Streeting has chosen to deliver his message to them through The Daily Telegraph, which they know hates the NHS. If he was intending to be provocative, he will most certainly have succeeded. If he wanted to be treated like an idiot, he clearly set out to achieve that goal. The man is really not helping himself — or us — by the stupidity of his far-right politics.

I would rather the doctors were not on strike. But, in an economy which is steadily moving towards failing everyone within it, except a wealthy elite, disputes of this sort are inevitable. If those who take massive responsibility cannot afford to survive within this country, there is something profoundly wrong, and that, in essence, is what this strike is highlighting. It is not about doctors' desire for better pay in isolation, although they are worth it. This is about an economic system that is on the precipice of collapse. This strike is a sign of things to come.