

Dr Yannis Gourtoyannis (BMA junior doctors)

The coming month is going to be an axial moment for the future of the NHS. My union's willingness to take a stand against this government is probably the most positive single development that has occurred in this country over the last 20 years. 50,000 junior doctors are waking up and seeing the bigger picture. They are starting to realise we are a crucial line of defence in the battle for multiple fronts. Some of us believe we hold in our hands the fuse to ignite the wider healthcare workers' movement in a common defence of the NHS.

This battle will be a long one and it won't be won on the front pages of the national media. This battle will be won by being sincere in our arguments and taking those arguments directly to the British public.

We will win this when organisations with a common goal start coming together in a collaborative way. When the battle for the NHS become a core part of the public discourse. We will win this when we are not afraid to speak of these issues in political terms, when these become questions for all concerned citizens.

On 12 January we followed through a well-organised, national industrial action. In effect, a form of mass whistle-blowing. The public's response at the pickets was overwhelmingly positive. It was an incredibly moving experience. What we experienced confounded the cynical claims repeatedly made politicians and media that we would somehow lose public support if we went for industrial action. On the contrary, our resolve has gained us public support.

Our natural allies, other trade unionists in other sectors, did not let us down. They issued public statements of support for us. They stood by us.

But let's not underestimate how much more there is to do. The forces ranged against the BMA are considerable. Jeremy Hunt's wilfully misleading soundbites are a problem, but a small part of the problem. Because the entire political economy of this country will be deployed against the BMA. From the manufactured crisis in NHS finances and the ideology of austerity, to the media's relentless smear campaign and the legal strictures of the harshest trade union laws in Europe, the BMA does have its work cut out for it.

Looking ahead for the next few months, I am cautiously optimistic. We are doing well. The government is on the back foot. But ultimately we will need you – the members of all the organisations present here today.

Just as the social democratic consensus began with the inception of the NHS in 1948, so too will the NHS be the site of Britain's last stand against the all-consuming forces of austerity, of commercialism, and of Conservative dogma.