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COMMENT

Obama fuels Brexit fears

DOES Britain's special relationship with the US give our close allies the right to stick their noses into our politics?

Barack Obama has urged the UK to stick with the EU, during his final trip to Britain as president, when he stopped in for lunch with the Queen and met David Cameron for talks.

The president's intervention in the UK's forthcoming referendum on June 23 has been hotly debated and sparked claims of hypocrisy from those who want to sever ties with Brussels. They claim the US would never contemplate ceding its own power to an international body such as the EU, and would pay no attention if Britain sought to meddle in its political affairs.

President Obama has acknowledged that, ultimately, the matter is for British voters to decide for themselves.

But he also said the outcome was a matter of deep interest to the US, pointing to the thousands of Americans who rest in Europe's cemeteries as "a silent testament to just how intertwined our prosperity and security truly are".

It is a sign of the profound concern felt in Washington about the implications of a British departure from the EU that the president voiced his feelings so publicly.

He went on to say the UK had benefited from being inside the EU in terms of counter terrorism, jobs, trade and financial growth, and that it magnified our global influence.

Obama made it clear the UK would go to the back of the queue in terms of trade deals with the US if it left the EU. Brexit campaigners have claimed that the UK would be able to strike trade deals with countries like the US quickly and easily if it were to leave the EU. Britain's prosperity would depend on such deals. But the president has killed that notion.

Amid the rhetoric, fear and jingoism, the argument that Brexit risks British jobs and prosperity is gaining momentum.

What do you think?
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The Northern Echo Daily average audience

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Source: JICREG & ABC Jul-Dec 2013

Online **33,990**

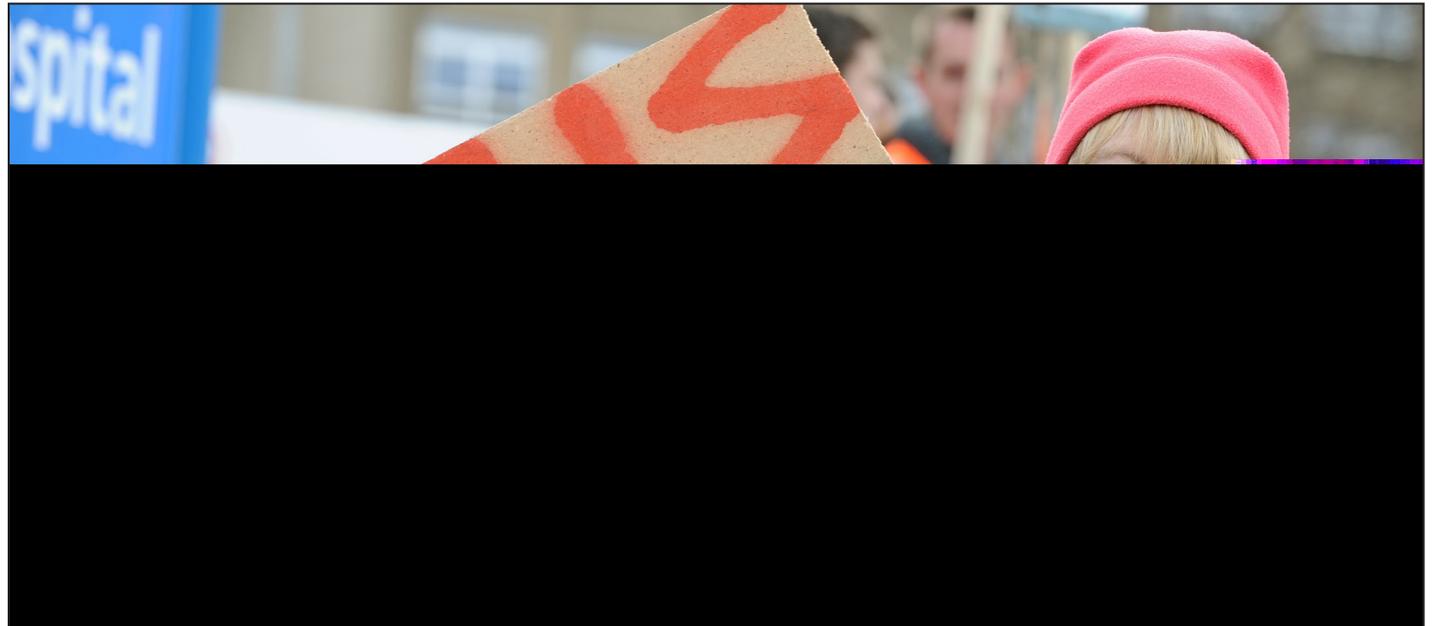
Source: ABCE Jul-Dec 2013

TOTAL **113,660**

QUALITY

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Doctors strike about 'respect'



STAND: Helen Jones with fellow junior doctors on a picket line outside her hospital

THE next planned all-out junior doctors' strike takes place next Tuesday and Wednesday. At the time of writing there is no evidence that it might be halted at the last minute.

If it goes ahead, the strike will be a landmark event – the first industrial action since the inception of the NHS to affect emergency services including A&E, emergency operations and treatments.

It is the latest in a series of strikes in a dispute between the Government and the British Medical Association, with regards to pay and working hours for junior doctors currently in the system, as well as newly qualifying doctors.

It stems from research published in the British Medical Journal by Sir Bruce Keogh, medical director of the NHS and a former cardiac surgeon, which showed that patients admitted on weekends had a greater risk of death than those admitted during midweek. And despite concerns that this data was gathered to appeal to his political superiors, and did not fully take into account that patients who present themselves to the hospital during a weekend are more likely to be in an emergency situation and hence more ill, the Government has used this material to try to impose a contract on junior doctors, whereby they will rostered to work more weekends than under the previous system, but with a relative drop in pay.

Under the last contract, weekends and nights were classified as unsociable hours, and attracted a banding dependent on the number worked. However under the proposed contract, Saturdays will no longer be deemed as anti-social hours, despite extending from 8am until 8pm. The imposed contract will also have an adverse effect on part-time workers.

While consultants' pay starts at just under £75,000, the starting salary for a junior doctor is just £23,000. Putting this into context, the average national salary in 2015 was £26,500. For this, junior doctors will have studied a minimum of five years at university, often racking up unavoidable debts which may be well over £70,000. Due to the competition for university places, it is unlikely that



The Government's showdown with the medical profession moves into uncharted territory next week. North-East GP **Zak Uddin** explains why junior doctors deserve our support

successful applicants will be able to study in an institution close to home, often putting them hundreds of miles from loved ones and friends. Even once qualified, it's more likely that you'll start to practice where you studied, rather than moving back home.

While it is estimated that medical graduates are among the top five per cent of the population intellectually, this is often not reflected in pay scales. But the demographic of those being admitted to medical school is also changing, with a greater number of entrants from less well-off backgrounds. The numbers of female medical students is also on the rise. So the typical stereotype of the white male from an affluent middle-class background, with a private education, hoping for a good job with a good salary, who might have also chosen law or perhaps finance as alternate careers, doesn't hold true anymore. From my experience, medical students are increasingly aware of what becoming a doctor entails, and are choosing to enter the profession with their eyes open. And because money is often not a motivating factor in choosing medicine as a career, bright young doctors need to feel like a worthwhile member of the team, as well as a respected

professional. The changing face of medicine has meant that more and more roles that traditionally would have been the domain of the junior doctor have been devolved to allied health professionals such as specialist nurses. Hence, the junior doctor may not be seen as, or themselves feel as, important as they once might have been.

However, make no mistake. This country needs junior doctors to provide vital care, and to develop and become the consultants and general practitioners of the future. They provide an excellent service, 24-hours-a-day, dealing with often stressful situations, and sometimes with little support. The British medical education system produces some of the finest, if not the finest, doctors in the world, who deserve a good salary, an appropriate amount of respect, but also enough time off to be safe as well as to have a full life outside of medicine. They do not need the heavyweights of the medico-political world wading into express their displeasure about junior doctors' lack of loyalty to the cause.

In the meantime, members of the public need not fear. During the last strike, almost half of junior doctors reported for work, and during the upcoming strike there will still be a full consultant presence for any emergencies that may arise.

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Dr Zak Uddin