

GRASSROOTS FIGHT FOR 15% CAN WIN BY ESCALATING ACTION

Trade union leaders are still refusing to take health workers' demands for a genuine pay rise seriously. To win, workers need to prepare to act without them if necessary

Rallies and demonstrations are due to take place across the country, as part of a growing grassroots revolt by nurses and health workers excluded from a recent public sector pay rise.

The campaign was kicked off at the beginning of August with protests in 40 towns and cities calling for a 15% rise now.

The spread of the revolt shows the anger of health workers on the frontline of fighting coronavirus, working overtime and without adequate staffing and PPE, which has resulted in more than 500 health workers dying from the virus.

Unions

The government is using the three-year pay deal negotiated in 2019 as an excuse to deny nurses a pay rise. But this deal was a betrayal, which was only accepted by members after the deal was misrepresented by the leaderships of Unison and the RCN.

The unions have called for the government to bring the pay negotiations forward to this year. Unison has called for a pre-tax rise of £2,000 for all health workers. According to campaigners, the RCN will go for more. But their demands fall far short of workers need.

After a ten year pay freeze imposed by Labour and then Conservative governments to pay for bailing out the banks, nurses and other public sector workers have seen the real value of their pay fall by up to 20%.

So far the official trade union leaders have been largely absent from protests, preferring to deal behind closed doors with government ministers.

Their record over the last ten years has been to preside over a massive attack on our health service, the loss of tens of thousands of jobs and hospital beds, and forcing thousands of workers to live on poverty wages.

Without a fight, the trade unions won't fight for 15% and the government won't pay it. Workers need to be prepared to go on strike in order to win their legitimate demands. Cross-union workplace committees should be set up and coordinated nationally to prepare a campaign of industrial action, with the trade union leaders if they fight – and without them if they won't.

NHS crisis

The pandemic has laid bare the consequences of decades of marketisation, outsourcing and underfunding of the NHS and social care services.

There are currently 40,000 vacancies in the NHS alone. Brexit will pile on the pressure as thousands of skilled healthcare workers opt to leave the country than be subject to the humiliation of working for poverty wages under a government that blames them for its own failings.

The end of the furlough scheme and lockdown without an adequate track and trace system, is fuelling the inevitable second wave in the Autumn, piling the pressure onto an overstretched and underfunded NHS.

Other countries brought the private sector into at least temporary public ownership in order to cope with the pandemic. In Britain the government forced the NHS to pay the profiteers! Despite their hypocritical clapping, the Tories are determined to use the pandemic health crisis to continue running our health service into the ground, preparing to offer it up in trade talks with Trump's USA this Autumn.

Only the total renationalisation of the entire NHS and its extension to social care, under the control of elected committees of healthcare workers and patients, and fully funded by taxing the wealth of the rich can halt the decline

and lay the basis for a health care system fit for the challenges of childhood obesity, an ageing population and pollution related illnesses.

Action

The snowballing protest movement demonstrates the level of rank and file anger at the contempt the government has shown to NHS staff through this pandemic.

This government has a large majority, but faced with mounting crises, it has been forced under popular pressure to make a dozen U-turns, from NHS parking charges, to student exam grades.

An overwhelming 69% of the public support the extension of the pay rise to all NHS workers, including nurses, cleaners, porters and midwives.

Determined action by grassroots activists can mobilise pressure and the NHS can lead the way in winning pay justice for all. The public sector unions should join the health workers in a united campaign this autumn to fight for a real pay rise and expansion of funding for public services, paid for by taxing the rich and corporations profiting from the crisis.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

- 25% pay rise for all grades to restore pay levels
- Massive recruitment drive to fill vacancies
- Production and distribution of PPE under public ownership
- End all outsourcing
- Scrap PFI deals with no compensation to profiteers
- Scrap the migrant NHS surcharge

AGREE? JOIN US!