

NHS pay offer is a pay cut: vote 'no'!

- **Stop wage erosion: link pay to inflation**
- **Organise across all grades to demand a real rise**
- **End privatisation and tax the rich to fund the NHS**

PAT CULLEN, general secretary of the RCN, returned from the negotiating table late last month with a real pay cut, not just for this year but for next year as well. She also returned to an outcry of anger from nurses, who immediately saw through the figures and mobilised for resistance to the sell-out.

The offer includes the paltry 3.5% increase awarded by the Pay Review Body but adds two non-consolidated bonuses worth on average 5%, according to nurse activists who know how to interpret the figures. Finally, it accepts a pay rise of 5% for 2023–24.

But since this merely replaces the 5% one off bonuses for this year, given the rising costs of living—CPI rose to 9.2% per year in February and food prices by 18.2%—this adds up at best to zero, and an actual pay cut for the lower grades.

All union leaders have signed up to the deal except Unite, the smallest NHS union. But all eyes are on the RCN, since they have launched (limited) strike action. Cullen has already threatened rejectionist members, saying this is 'the government's final offer', after which there will be no more talks, and even that the bonuses will be withdrawn if nurses vote no.

NHS Workers Say No

Activists immediately responded to these haughty threats, tweeting:

'Let's be clear, this offer is the result of a relatively small number of strike days taken by some of the NHS workforce—a bigger strike mandate taken by a bigger portion of the workforce would shift the government even further. The Government saying there's no more money is a standard line they feed too. There was no money for this offer back in December, but here we are.'

This is no idle rhetoric either. The junior doctors, aggrieved at starting pay of just £14 an hour, have announced a four-day strike starting 11 April. Eight hundred Unite members at St Thomas's and Guys hospital, London, have delivered a resounding 92% strike mandate, including nurses, pharmacists, estates staff and medical technicians.

This shows that the NHS strikes are still growing and, given the correct

leadership, staff are willing to strike harder for longer in order to win. This, alongside the solidarity NHS workers will always have from the wider working class, makes this the key dispute at the moment.

NHS Workers Say NO is a grassroots campaign, built on the #NHSPay15 campaign of 2020, which successfully forced the unions to put in claims for the restoration of pay lost since 2010. Now that inflation has ripped through their pay packets, they are more determined than ever to get a real pay rise.

In many areas they are asking solidarity groups to leaflet hospitals with #VoteReject flyers. Get involved with this crucial solidarity campaign! If nurses reject this insulting offer and can get the strikes put back on, it can inspire other groups of workers. The government knows this—as do our leaders—and are scared. Let's give them something to be scared about.

- Reject the real pay cut!
- Organise across all grades and unions to strike for more!
- Fully fund the NHS by taxing the rich!

Agree with us? Get in touch to get organised for a real pay rise!

Feeble opposition allows Tories to attack unions and refugees

RISHI SUNAK and Jeremy Hunt are notching up successes over their enemies in the Tory Party, the bitter cliques around Boris Johnson and Liz Truss. They have defeated both the demands for a further clash with the EU and Biden over the Northern Ireland Protocol and a return to tax cuts in the Budget.

The ultra-Brexit Tory right has been disciplined and the new Tory leadership is preparing the ground for a general election next year with vigorous campaigns on law and order (new anti-union laws, restrictions on the right to protest, new anti-social behaviour orders), refugee and migrant scapegoating (Illegal Migrants Bill, Nationality and Borders Bill), and a conflict with the Scottish nationalists (independence referendum and the Gender Recognition Act).

Sunak's big breakthrough was securing a massive majority for the Windsor Framework, which resets UK-EU relations. While Sunak was indeed an ardent supporter of Brexit, he did not share the reactionary obsessions and prejudices of the hard-line European Research Group. Instead, he belonged to that camp which advocates a quite coherent strategy: to free British capital from EU regulation, avoid continental integration and, instead, mobilise Britain's financial institutions globally under US protection and leadership. This required putting an end to politically counterproductive rows over the Irish border.

Sunak and Hunt are gambling on a substantial reduction in the rate of inflation over the year ahead. In this they are being aided by the Bank of England whose continued interest rate rises are aimed at 'cooling the economy', i.e. triggering a recession.

Labour retains a substantial lead in the polls, but with the next election as much as 20 months away, the Tories retain many advantages. Firstly, the electoral map is being redrawn (gerrymandered) to the Tories' advantage. Secondly, the failure of the unions to lead a real fight over pay could allow Sunak to emerge victorious by making minor concessions (as most of the health unions are

promoting now). Thirdly, the continued running down of the NHS will promote private healthcare, reducing the universal status of the NHS and the welfare state more generally as a mobilising factor in the election. Finally, Hunt's conservative budget means the Tories are accruing a war-chest for pre-election giveaways in the autumn and spring.

Make Labour fight

Starmer's strategy is based on the assumption that further dramatic declines in living standards will make the Tories ever more unpopular. He calculates that policies to control immigration, tough talk on asylum seekers and anti-social behaviour will bring back the "red wall" and appeal to the media barons and sections of the business and financial elite.

That is not guaranteed. If Sunak can impose Tory party stability, deliver improved trade with the EU and provide some tax breaks, that could claw back electoral credibility. Those elites know that, despite Sunak's intentions, a Labour victory could encourage expectations of improved living standards, repeal of anti-union laws and rebalancing of taxation against the rich.

All this means that 'waiting for Labour', the official, if generally unspoken, political 'strategy' of the trade union leaders is totally bankrupt. What workers need is a dramatic change of direction: a real coordinated fight to reject below-inflation pay cuts, a serious campaign against the attempt to outlaw public sector strikes and, above all, a political struggle to force Labour-affiliated unions to demand, with threats, the adoption of a pro-working class emergency programme to restore living standards, end militarism abroad, and place the big banks, utilities, transport and health and social care sector under public, democratic control to address the immediate health and climate crises.

The unions who pay millions to Labour need to make it clear that they will not swallow a Blairite manifesto or, for that matter, a right wing Labour government. That could be the launch pad for replacing a thinly disguised capitalist party with a genuine workers' party.

Defend the right to asylum

THE GOVERNMENT is responding to an increase in refugees crossing the Channel in small boats by criminalising asylum seekers and forcing refugees to live in concentration camps.

The Illegal Migration Bill has now passed its second reading. If enacted, it will place a legal duty on the government to detain and deport nearly all those who arrive 'irregularly'. The bill also cuts asylum seekers' right to seek a judicial review against Home Office decisions—these have repeatedly obstructed Home Secretary Suella Braverman's Rwanda deportation plan.

Recent scandals have exposed the nature of Britain's asylum system, where the only thing 'bogus' is refugee rights. The Manston processing centre, plagued by reports of guards assaulting inmates, detains lone children as young as 14 and houses thousands in tents, causing outbreaks of disease. Hundreds of vulnerable young people have been abducted from Home Office hotels.

Braverman's Bill also includes an annual cap on the number of refugees the UK will offer sanctuary, to be introduced only 'once the boats have been stopped'—an admission that the government will never introduce safe routes to make perilous crossings unnecessary.

The United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCR) has condemned the legislation, saying it 'would amount to an asylum ban—extinguishing the right to seek refugee protection in the United Kingdom for those who arrive irregularly, no matter how genuine and compelling their claim may be,' adding, 'this would be a clear breach of the refugee convention'.

Braverman has admitted in a letter to Tory MPs and Lords that there is a more than 50% chance the Bill would be struck down by the courts because it breaches the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Rabid Tory Brexiters are using the opportunity to argue for Britain to withdraw from the convention (which is nothing to do with the EU).

Refugees welcome

The real 'crisis' is in the countries from which they are fleeing climate change, famine and war. The second highest number of boat refugees come from Afghanistan, which Britain occupied for 20 years and left in disaster.

Trade unions and the Labour Party should lead the way in organising a campaign in our communities to counter the myths about refugees, and defend migrants from raids and harassment by police and the far right.

We need to wage a determined struggle to kill this vicious Bill and make all migrants welcome here.