

Defy anti-union laws and fight for a real pay rise

The NHS pay dispute has reached a critical point after High Court judges ruled nurses must cut short their strike and GMB members voted to accept the derisory pay deal. The fight goes on, but to win a real pay rise health workers must prepare to defy the anti-trade union laws and organise to take control of the dispute.

Before the court case, RCN general secretary Pat Cullen promised a robust defence of the strike. But on the day, the union's lawyers did not attend: Cullen simply read out a statement saying the union believed its strike was lawful.

Whatever the reason, it fits into a pattern of RCN leaders making things easy for the government. First, Cullen unilaterally reduced the union's claim down from the democratically agreed 19.5% to 10%. Then, they only selectively called hospitals out on strike. Then, the RCN called off action to allow for talks—which lifted the pressure off the government. Finally, the leadership aggressively campaigned for members to accept a totally inadequate offer.

The fact that the Tories resorted to the hated anti-union laws to ban the second day of the strike is proof that only determined strike action backed by a massive solidarity campaign can force the government into paying up. But the RCN leadership's failure to defend its right to strike shows that it is the members themselves who should have control over the strategy and the negotiations—not the highly paid and unaccountable professional negotiators and officials.

Defend the right to strike

The anti-union laws were designed by the Tories to outlaw effective trade union action. The legal threshold for action prevented hundreds of thousands of health workers from striking during this dispute. Now the Tories want to introduce 'minimum service' laws which would force workers to scab on their own strikes.

The best way to defend the right to strike—is to strike! The RCN should refuse to cancel the second day of action. If nurses walk out unofficially, or refuse to cross picket lines where Unite is striking, they would send a powerful message that they won't be intimidated by government bullies or their tame judges.

Rank and file control

The fact that RCN leaders campaigned for a deal which is less than half the rate of inflation—and only a quarter of the original claim shows that the future conduct of the dispute cannot be left in their hands.

The rank and file nurses' groups which developed during the vote to reject the deal are now turning their attention to securing the biggest possible turnout in the re-ballot. Cullen's threat to take the dispute 'up to Christmas', is

a clear attempt to discourage members with another long drawn-out campaign. The quickest way to end the dispute is by a programme of serious, escalating action.

Every workplace should hold mass meetings to elect a strike committee to build the Yes vote in the re-ballot and discuss the most effective forms of action. Union members can encourage officials to fight for the full claim by demanding rank and file representation in the negotiations.

A healthworkers' union

The whole course of the NHS pay campaign shows the urgent need for a single, democratic and fighting union for health workers. The existence of three general unions (Unison, GMB and Unite) and a multitude of professional associations has weakened, not strengthened the dispute.

While the anti-union laws are a major undemocratic obstacle, the neglect of workplace organisation by most unions is also a factor in the failure to make the threshold for strike action. Health workers can make a start by forming cross-union committees where unions are taking action to coordinate activity and demands.

By building on the grassroots organisation which led to the successful 'no' vote and linking the dispute to a wider campaign to defend the NHS, health workers can still win this battle.

Agree with us? Get in touch!

Prices, bills and rents—up. Wages—down. It's a rip-off!

THE LATEST inflation figure of 10.1% surprised many economists. It won't have surprised many workers—except that it wasn't higher.

The *Mirror* reported on the day of the announcement, 'Struggling households are now faced with shocking food prices, with cheese 49% more expensive than a year ago, eggs up 28%, sugar 33% and a white sliced loaf 20%.'

'Last month,' The *Mirror* concludes, we 'paid 19% more on a weekly shop, the highest [rise] since 1977'.

The other main driver of inflation is energy. According to government statistics (ONS) electricity rose by 66.7% last year and gas by an astronomical 129.4%.

Because working class families spend a far higher percentage of their income on fuel and food, for us inflation is much higher than 10%. But this is deliberately obscured by the fog of official statistics.

Yet Jeremy Hunt has the nerve to say that rising wages were a 'significant' factor driving inflation. He claims the average wage rise of 6.9% is 'inflationary'.

How can it be when pay is lagging multiple percentage points behind the headline inflation figure? And that's before you even start to look at the real rise in the cost of living for working class families.

It shows the nurses and teachers were absolutely right to reject this Chancellor's insult of an offer—less than 10% over two years! After a decade of real falling wages, nothing less than a real cost of living pay rise is 'affordable'. Add to this the shortfall of over 40,000 nurses in the NHS and anyone can see that nurses' (and junior doctors') pay is a major factor in the deliberate running down of the NHS.

The bosses' plan

Forcing down real wages is what lies behind the Tories' push to get over-50s back into work and the recently announced benefits sanctions to force the unemployed and single mums back into the labour market. Not because there's any

decent jobs out there, but to increase competition for work so that trade unionists will be afraid to put in for increases that make up for inflation.

The capitalists' other tool to combat inflation is for the Bank of England to keep raising interest rates. This makes borrowing more expensive. But millions of us are trapped in debts we cannot easily get out of—on credit cards, mortgages, etc. Even renters will face increases as landlords put up their rents to pay off their mortgages.

Although the rate of price increases will likely slow, if energy prices come down, they will remain historically high, if the Bank of England increases interest rates to 5% and keeps them there for a long time.

It is at this point that economists predict indebted companies will start to fail, as the banks refuse to roll over their debts. That means closures and job cuts—unless there's a fightback.

Strikes

This makes the strikes all the more important to win. Two or even three year deals that tie in our best organised and most combative unions to falling real wages would be a disaster.

It is up to rank and file workers, like those behind the successful NHS Workers Say NO campaign, to organise resistance to the union leaders' sell-out deals. Those currently balloting to strike must vote for action, so we can build the momentum up again.

But this time—in the second wave of strikes—we must force the union leaders to escalate the action, up to all-out indefinite strikes if necessary. We should demand they coordinate their strikes, their demos and their slogans. We must aim to bust the Tories' economic policy to pieces.

We demand:

- Real pay rises for all.
- Instead of two-year deals, our pay should rise monthly to keep up with prices.
- No job cuts or closures—occupy to stop the bosses removing their assets.

workers power

What we stand for

Behind the Tories and their billionaire backers lies the capitalist system. It is a system that puts millions on the dole, seeks to drive down wages and destroys the environment. It is a system that diverts attention from its crimes by bloody wars, and by dividing up the workers amongst themselves by promoting racism and sexism.

We want a socialist revolution to replace this system with one where production is guided by the needs of the many, not the profits of the few. That means taking the wealth of society, the banks and the major firms, into the hands of the working class and drawing up a democratic plan of production under workers' control.

To get this we have to break the resistance of the capitalist state: the police, courts, army and judiciary and replace it with a new kind of state based on democratically elected and accountable workers' councils.

The working class has the power to do this. It is rediscovering its potential to defeat the bosses through strike action. We think that power should be used to smash capitalism and build a new kind of society without poverty, oppression and war.

We fight for a working class unity and a revolutionary party based on a programme of action:

- A living wage, pension and social security for all, indexed to inflation.
- Controls on prices, rents and bills.
- Workers' control over all strikes and negotiations. For a rank and file movement to dissolve the bureaucracy and create fighting, democratic unions.
- Women's liberation: social provision of childcare and domestic labour. Full reproductive rights on demand.
- No platform for fascists. Workers' unity against racist police and bosses.
- Open borders: equal rights for all migrants and refugees from day one.
- No to war: Britain out of Nato. For national liberation against imperialism.
- A workers' government based on and accountable to councils of workers' delegates.
- Expropriate the fortunes of the rich to fund public services and a just transition.
- Nationalisation under workers' control of the major banks, transport, utilities, public services, manufacturing.
- A revolutionary party, united with socialists across the world in a new world party of socialist revolution—a Fifth International.

If you want to fight for socialism, international solidarity and revolution, join Workers Power today.

