

# NHS trade unions’ “best deal in eight years” revealed as a fraud

Ajanta Silva  
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National Health Service (NHS) workers, who have suffered a massive erosion in pay over the last eight years, are angry as the reality of the so-called “pay rise” negotiated by health trade unions and the Tory government becomes apparent.

July pay slips, confirmed by the NHS pay calculator system, expose as lies what the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) called the “best deal in eight years.”

Fourteen trade unions were involved in the NHS pay negotiations early this year. All but one, the GMB, accepted a rotten below-inflation deal. The GMB’s muted opposition entirely avoided criticism of the other unions involved.

Only health workers at the top of their pay bands and whose incremental pay progression fell during March to July this year will get a 3 percent pay increase as part of the 6.5 percent increase over three years. Many of the over 1.3 million NHS workers only received a below-inflation rise of 1.5 percent in July. The rest of their miserly three percent increase will be paid in the month their annual incremental pay progression falls. The lowest paid workers will see unsocial hours payments reduced by several percentage points and sickness absence enhancement payments slashed.

The deal raises the pay of the lowest paid workers just 18 pence above the current national living wage of £8.50. That significant sections of NHS workers, including porters, catering staff and health care assistants, have had to subsist on less than the minimum living wage for years is an indictment not just of the Tories, but the unions and Labour Party who were complicit in these attacks.

Over the last eight years, with the unions not lifting a finger in opposition, health workers—like other public sector workers—saw their pay slashed by over 14 percent through pay freezes and pay caps.

Once the new deal was agreed with the employers, the unions mobilised all their resources, including reps and

propaganda, utilizing hospital notice boards and online media to dazzle members with misinformation and lies to push through acceptance. The largest public sector union, Unison, called it “a proposal for a far-reaching modernisation of the NHS pay structure in England over the next three years, which would result in significant pay rises for every single member of staff and could turn the tide of the NHS staffing crisis.”

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn gave his personal backing, retweeting endorsements of the deal from Shadow Treasury and Shadow Health secretaries, Peter Dowd and Jon Ashworth.

Among the lies were:

- A three percent pay rise for everyone would be paid in July and backdated to April.
- The deal was a pay increase of at least 6.5 percent over three years, but much more—up to 29 percent—for some members.
- There would be quicker progression to the top of pay bands.
- Unsocial hours payments would be unchanged.

Early in the negotiations, it emerged that the unions were conspiring with government for workers to lose one day of annual leave in exchange for a meagre pay increase. This resulted in a massive outcry from workers and the unions had to retreat. But they later used this to sell the deal, claiming “untouched annual leave” was integral.

To foist the deal on members, the unions concealed the real facts behind it:

- A 6.5 percent pay “increase” over three years is a real term wage cut, as the estimated combined Retail Price Index inflation hike in that period will be 9.6 percent.
- Future pay progression is tied to performance. Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt welcomed the deal as imposing “profound changes in productivity.”
- Sickness absence enhancements of low paid workers

will be slashed and unsocial hours payments amount will go down by several percentage points for workers on band 1-3 of the Agenda for Change pay system.

- Many workers will receive only a 1.5 percent pay rise until their incremental pay progression.

As a final move to impose the dirty deal, the unions held a gun to workers' heads on behalf of the Tories. They threatened that "If they're [the pay proposals] not accepted, the NHS pay increase for 2018/19 will be determined through the usual mechanism, and be based on NHS pay review body recommendations [i.e. a further pay cut]."

Based on this campaign of lies and distortions, health workers in 13 unions voted to accept the deal, although the low turnout points to disillusionment with the unions. Only 27 percent of Unite NHS and 30 percent of Unison members participated in the ballot. The RCN did not reveal its turnout, but a branch secretary writing on social media claimed only around 10 percent of members voted.

In a desperate attempt to placate angry members, RCN Chief Executive and General Secretary Janet Davis wrote on July 25, "It has come to my attention in the last 24 hours [!] that the deal was not as straightforward as we said and for that I offer you a sincere personal apology." In words that should be rejected with contempt, this highly paid (£137,170 including perks and expenses) and privileged appendage of management, admitted, "In good faith, we told all members that they would receive a 3% uplift this summer. I now find that this is not the case for everyone."

There was never any misunderstanding by the RCN, as proven by their statement that they would not be reopening the deal. NHS Employers, which agreed the deal with the unions, confirmed there was never an agreement for a 3 percent rise in the first year.

Health workers expressed outrage as the truth about the latest union sellout came to light, with many seeing through the RCN's transparent damage limitation operation.

On the *Nursing Standard* Facebook page, Sue Wise Lodge wrote "Furious is an understatement, I tell you what RCN, reimburse your members subscriptions for the past year for all the incorrect information and lies you've fed us all. You should all hang your heads in shame, and I for one will be cancelling my subscription and encourage others to do the same."

Leah Hooton wrote "Payrise?? what payrise? it works out to be about £30 a month for myself. I did not vote yes for this deal as we deserve more and it didn't make up for

the YEARS of pay freeze we've suffered while MPs have had rise after rise after rise and for what? You wouldn't see them agreeing to £30 a month extra. It doesn't cover my petrol costs or a day of childcare in the holidays or parking fees at work. It's a joke and an insult to our profession."

Catherine Roper said: "Too little too late. In bed with Mr Hunt & co & got caught out! Shame on all unions you have shafted us big time. Credit to GMB they did put out a warning but it was muted. Let the unions pay back to all members at least 2 years membership fees for the secret & lies they planned with the government!"

An advanced nurse practitioner tweeted, "Rather than an apology, how about a public denouncement of the deal, an apology and a declaration to fight it and poll members for action?"

RCN activists secured the 1,000 signatures required for an Emergency General Meeting within days. Their petition states they were "misled" and have "no confidence in the current leadership of the Royal College of Nursing and call for them to stand down." The RCN agreed to hold a meeting, but not until late September.

Health workers can place no faith in the unions. In March, NHS FightBack, an initiative of the Socialist Equality Party, examined the publicly known facts about the deal and called on NHS workers to reject it as a sellout. In opposition to the unions' propaganda, we explained that "In reality it is a further pay cut."

We explained, "In order to defeat the government and NHS employers' diktats, NHS staff must act and organise independently of the trade unions and establish rank-and-file committees to unite with all other workers coming under ferocious attack. On this basis, a powerful joint offensive can be established of NHS workers, local government staff, education workers and employees throughout the public sector."

**Contact NHS FightBack today! For further information visit:**

[nhsfightback.org](http://nhsfightback.org) and [facebook.com/Fight4theNHS](https://facebook.com/Fight4theNHS)



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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