

Vote “yes” on resolution to force out Royal College of Nursing leadership! Build rank-and-file committees!

NHS FightBack
28 September 2018

NHS FightBack and the Socialist Equality Party call on Royal College of Nursing (RCN) members to back today’s Extraordinary General Meeting resolution: “We have no confidence in the current leadership of the Royal College of Nursing and call on Council to stand down.”

The resolution gives voice to the growing rebellion among nurses and health workers against the RCN executive’s collusion with the Conservative government’s austerity attacks on the National Health Service (NHS).

The proposer’s statement denounces the misleading information used by the union leadership to push through a sell-out pay deal, which will see another real-terms pay cut for health workers after eight years of wage restraint. It states that the “Council must accept accountability for the actions of the RCN in relation to the 2018 pay award.”

In March, 13 out of 14 health unions, including the RCN, agreed to a 6.5 percent pay increase over three years, knowing that inflation is estimated to rise by 9.6 percent over the same time frame. The union turned reality on its head, proclaiming the pay deal as the “best deal in eight years.” It claimed it “will amount to an increase of at least 6.5% over three years, but much more for some members, up to 29%.”

The unions’ claim that the pay deal is fully funded by the Treasury should also be taken with a pinch of salt. The money will be extracted one way or another from the NHS, in a situation where NHS providers already have an underlying deficit of around £4.3 billion and NHS trusts are forecasting a combined deficit of more than £500 million this year.

Knowing the unions’ track record—helping to impose

cuts and freezes and doing nothing to prevent NHS vacancies reaching a staggering figure of 107,743 (nursing vacancies are predicted to go up to 41,722 this year)—few members turned out to vote for the offer. Only 18 percent of RCN members took part in the ballot, with most voting to accept the deal solely because of the leadership’s lies.

When July’s pay cheques arrived, many health workers received a meagre increase of 1.5 percent, with the rest of the first year increase delayed until after their annual incremental date. Anger increased in August when health workers reported receiving an average of just £75 for five months’ back pay.

Health workers took to social media to denounce the unions. A petition of RCN members calling on the leaders to resign received more than the required 1,000 signatures to have an Extraordinary General Meeting within 24 hours of its launch.

Seeking to limit the damage and head off a full-scale rebellion, RCN Chief Executive and General Secretary Janet Davies stepped down last month and the RCN council set up “an independent external review into the processes and communication of the 2018 Pay Deal.” The council is adamant that it will not revisit the pay deal!

A review is not needed to know that the unions were doing the dirty work for a government committed to austerity and privatisation. The RCN’s “processes and communication” were totally geared to selling the rotten deal to its members.

The attempts to dress up the deal were so blatant that even the independent review interim report includes an extract from a briefing from the lead negotiator to the Chair of Council on February 21, reading, “If the

unions (this means Unison and/or RCN for all practical purposes as the 2 biggest trade unions) are not able to go out to members with a positive recommendation to members the Treasury will...consider it too risky to proceed and the framework will be off the table.”

This behind-the-scenes skulduggery only came to light thanks to a leak, also showing that at one stage of negotiations the unions were conspiring with the government to forfeit one day of annual leave for health workers.

Nurses who are fighting the union sell-out cannot take a step forward just by replacing the top union bureaucrats. Over the last three decades, the trade unions have degenerated from defensive organisations of the working class into an industrial police force for governments and employers.

This is a global phenomenon. In New Zealand, nurses have rejected sell-out pay deals brokered by the New Zealand Nurses Organisation four times.

In the UK, the unions have overseen a 14 percent decrease in real wages in the public sector and betrayed those fighting back. In 2016, the British Medical Association isolated the strikes of the junior doctors against inferior contracts, leading to their defeat.

This year, the University College Union (UCU) shut down the determined struggle of its 50,000 members against the attack on their pensions. Strikes were called off, and a rotten deal was put to ballot without the required authorisation by local branches. Anger against the sell-out was so great that hundreds surrounded the UCU London headquarters demanding the agreement be repudiated.

All subsequent efforts by the members to hold the UCU leadership to account have been suppressed. When motions at this year’s UCU Congress criticising General Secretary Sally Hunt and her flunkies and calling for more democracy came up for debate, the guilty bureaucrats walked out forcing it to end early.

Today’s resolution reveals the growing anger and a determination to fight among workers, but this opposition must be organised. The next step must be the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the RCN and other health unions, to launch a united struggle with all workers in the NHS and throughout the public sector.

NHS FightBack and the Socialist Equality Party urge those attending today’s Extraordinary General Meeting

to contact us and mobilise the broadest support for this vital next step.

Contact NHS FightBack today. Visit and share our Facebook page.



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