

Royal College of Nursing calls police against members

For a rank-and-file rebellion by nurses to defeat sell-out pay deal!

NHS Fightback
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The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) calling the police to investigate members' petitioning for a no-confidence vote against the leadership marks a turning point in the year-long struggle of nurses. Nurses campaigning to reject the union's treacherous pay deal with the Tory government are being bullied, censored and criminalised.

How has this come to pass? And how can nurses and allied health workers defeat the efforts of the RCN and other health union bureaucrats to derail and defeat their determined struggle?

After the RCN announced its rotten pay deal with Health Secretary Steve Barclay, opposition by nurses erupted on social media. RCN bureaucrats accepted a paltry one-off 4 percent payment, and a 5 percent consolidated pay award for 2023-24 that leaves most nurses around £4,400 worse off in real terms than in 2008 and is less than half the 13.8 percent RPI rate of inflation for February.

The deal was a kick in the teeth for nurses who have suffered 12 years of continuous pay cuts that have provoked an exodus from the profession. Hospitals are dangerously understaffed, while many overworked nurses are relying on foodbanks to feed their family and struggling to meet basic living expenses including fuel to get to work.

The "NHS Workers Say NO" group has won significant support for its campaign for a no vote in the RCN ballot which closes April 14. It has more than 90,000 Facebook members and nearly 30,000 Twitter followers and has challenged the claims of RCN General Secretary Pat Cullen that the pay deal is a victory, organising a campaign in WhatsApp groups and online meetings.

Soon after the pay deal was announced on March 16, an online petition was launched calling for an extraordinary general meeting of the RCN on May 13 to bring a vote of no-confidence in Cullen and her executive team. Additionally, it called for a no-confidence vote in NEC Council members who endorsed the deal, and the RCN's negotiating committee. It quickly gathered 1,000 signatures, easily reaching the threshold required under RCN standing orders for an EGM.

Within hours of submitting their petition on March 23, its authors, reportedly including former senior members of the union, were subjected to extraordinary attack by the RCN leadership. The RCN told *Nursing Notes*, "We have reason to believe hundreds of names were fraudulently added to the petition" including the name of a deceased person.

RCN officials declared the petition was a "grotesque act" and "against the spirit and purpose of the EGM mechanism", without providing a shred of evidence for its strident claims.

The petition was taken offline, with an unnamed RCN spokesperson declaring, "This is now a significantly discredited and underhand petition and has been invalidated. As a result, we will not be taking this further."

The RCN told *Nursing Notes* the petition's authors would be pursued, with the union setting police and other state authorities against its membership, "We will be taking legal advice, involving the police, the regulator and carrying out a forensic examination."

RCN's dictatorial actions included a sweep of the union's social media accounts, with comments critical of the deal bureaucratically deleted. On Monday, the

RCN confirmed to the *Guardian* that it had reported publishers of hostile comments (branded as “bullying” and “harassment”) to social media platforms, presumably to have their accounts removed, and to the nursing regulator, which has the power to strip nurses of their license to practice.

The RCN leadership has announced that any future petition for a no-confidence vote, such as the one already re-launched by the RCN EGM Organising Committee, is automatically null and void, “Attempts to reboot the petition with an even greater cloak of anonymity will be considered invalid too.”

These are the actions of an industrial police force against the working class. The authors of the rebooted petition indicate a state of siege exists against members: “Because of the alleged targeting of EGM organisers by the Executive Team and General Secretary, we are remaining anonymous until the day of the EGM itself to protect the Committee Members from intimidation or threats.”

The target of the RCN’s measures is not only those who have initiated the petition and campaigned for a no vote, but the many thousands of nurses and allied health workers who oppose the RCN’s cancellation of industrial action and acceptance of a rotten deal with the government.

A snap poll by *Nursing Notes* found just 33 percent of members would accept the pay deal, with informal polls on social media showing overwhelming opposition by nurses.

The ruthless measures employed by Cullen and the RCN executive to force through a yes vote and intimidate and suppress opposition show that the precondition for winning an above-inflation pay award is a rank-and-file rebellion by nurses against an unaccountable bureaucracy that works hand-in-glove with the Tory government and the state.

In its statement calling for a vote to reject the RCN’s deal, the “NHS Workers Say No” group wrote, “Make no mistake, it was strike action that got the unions in the room with the government, and it is strike action that will deliver full pay restoration.”

The RCN leadership in fact responded to the nurses’ action by forging a closer partnership with the Tories. The union “in the room” conspired with the government against striking members. A privileged apparatus resting on the suppression of the class

struggle, RCN bureaucrats have now responded to growing rank-and-file pressure with state repression and an assault on members’ basic democratic rights.

On March 17, NHS FightBack issued a call to our fellow workers to organise and defeat the Tory-union sell-out deal. We stated, “The union leaders, their national executives and negotiating committees are engaged in sabotage. They should be removed from their positions immediately. Emergency branch meetings should pass votes of no confidence in these sell-outs and traitors.”

As the statement explained, “This must be the beginning and not the end of a struggle to transfer power out of the hands of the union bureaucracy to the rank-and-file...”

“It is not enough for the old leaders to be thrown out. Something new must be built. Victory depends on the formation of workers’ own representative organisations, rank-and-file committees, independent of the structures of the union and free from the pressure of its staff. These would be run by the most trusted workers, popularly elected and committed to fight against sellouts and for workers’ basic interests.”

A campaign linking health workers with those at Royal Mail, the railways, universities, colleges and schools, and the millions protesting and striking in France and across Europe, provides the basis for a powerful counteroffensive against the efforts of the Labour and trade union bureaucrats to divide and suppress workers’ struggles in defence of the financial oligarchy and capitalist state. We urge nurses and health workers to contact NHS FightBack to take forward this struggle today.



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