

Step Up The Strikes

A big stepping-up of strike action by workers inside and outside the NHS is what the health workers' struggle needs. But what do we get from the TUC and the Union leaders? A pathetic strike strategy: One day actions followed by weeks of inactivity. 6 months long struggle culminating in a TUC call for a one hour general strike!

The TUC and the Health Service Unions have adopted a policy all along designed to keep the lid on a potentially explosive struggle, capable of releasing all the pent-up frustrations of workers suffering wage cuts, redundancies, speed ups and escalating restrictions in all aspects of everyday life.

Calls by the NUPE conference and many mass meetings up and down the country for an all out strike with emergency cover, have been either ignored or condemned by Union leaders. Most of the action so far, whilst determined, has been in reality either symbolic or sectional.

UNITY NOT UNIONS

Other groups of workers, even in the public services and in the same Unions, many of them formerly in dispute with their own employers, have been deliberately 'kept on ice'. For instance local authority white collar workers, with the same minimal 12% demand due for settlement last July, and offered only 5%, have been called on to take sympathy action for Health workers, but NO action on their own behalf! Even then solidarity actions like those of the Fleet St. electricians had to be taken unofficially AGAINST the TUC and the Unions.

The Union strategy is precisely that which defeated the Health workers in 1979, the Civil Service workers in 1981, and the railway workers just 2 months ago. These negative lessons need to be learnt very quickly if the same fate is not to befall the Health workers today.

The lessons apply not only to the conduct of the dispute but to its objective. The aim is a 12% wage rise, just enough to cover last years CUT in wages. BUT the Unions are actually only asking for arbitration. We all know that at best all this would produce, even if the government accepted the arbitrator's recommendations, is 1 or 2% more than the offer.

All of this demonstrates that if this dispute is to be won, NHS workers must start to take control of it away from the TUC and the Unions and run things directly in their own interest.

That means :

1) Organising through general meetings and delegate committees of all the workers, irrespective of their position in the hierarchy or membership of different unions.

2) Sending delegates to other workplaces and arguing with them for real solidarity action.

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3) Starting an all out strike with the workers, not the hospital managers, controlling the emergency service.

4) Extending the strike to other (especially public service) sectors starting with those already in dispute and organising joint action.

5) Not being shy to take guerrilla actions outside the consent of the union bureaucracy. The occupation of an administration building by Rhondda nurses, which sparked off a rush of similar actions elsewhere, is a good example.

6) Struggling for the full 12% and nothing less.

The 22nd September Day of Action will only help the health workers' cause if its the start of a major escalation of action - by health workers and all workers. That way the 12% can be won.

But even then the Health workers will still be working for effectively the same pay as before last years cut - and for the same bosses and in the same hierarchical set up which keeps everyone firmly in their place - with the worst paid workers and the patients at the bottom of the pile.



At Wexham Park hospital in Berkshire nurses have refused instructions to drug patients against their will. Such actions challenge the whole authority structure of the Health Service. That challenge is needed not only in the Health Service but in all areas of society. Why should a privileged few take all the decisions about how society is run?

World-wide we all need to join our struggles together and overthrow the system that allows low pay and inadequate health care, when the resources exist to overcome this. We must create a society without bosses or leaders of any kind, where production is for human needs, and access to health care and all goods and services is freely available.