

Latest pay offer an insult to health workers!

Hands off our holidays! Above inflation pay rise for NHS staff!

THE LEAKED report on 2018's NHS pay deal in the Guardian in March set off alarm bells for NHS staff, who battle day in day out to provide care amidst cuts and privatisation. With staff morale at an all time low, it's yet another slap in the face.

The Guardian article reveals that “the Treasury and the Department of Health and Social Care plan to propose that all non-medical NHS staff in England receive a 3 percent rise in salary in 2018-19, and then rises of 1 percent to 2 percent in the following two years.”

So that would be around inflation for the first year, and very likely below inflation after. After suffering the longest sustained pay squeeze since records began in the 1850s, NHS workers deserve a real, fully above inflation rise. And more!

The sting in the tail—“the government ... is insisting that health workers give up a day's holiday in return for the £3.3bn deal.”

This is astonishing. After another devastating winter crisis (and a winter that hasn't yet ended!), NHS staff have been stretched to unprecedented and profoundly unsafe workload levels.

Dangerous

Many working in the NHS are forced daily to do their best to cope in circumstances of dangerous staff to patient ratios.

Nurses and others are leaving the profession in droves because their mental and physical health is threatened by a context where they simply can't provide the level of care they trained to deliver.

So it is outrageous to suggest an overall below inflation “rise”, at the cost of NHS workers' much treasured and already too few and far between holidays.

Our unions should be reacting in anger and, in united action, to this insult if the report is correct.

It should give health workers and our union leaders enormous confidence that shadow chancellor John McDonnell spoke out and condemned the proposal to make NHS staff give up a day's paid leave.

He was actually putting it mildly when he called it “mean-spirited”.



University staff show the way to fight: striking, in the sun or in the snow!

It is the height of hypocrisy, when you consider that the pay rise for MPs in the last three years has been 15 percent!

When it comes to paid holidays, MPs have had 217 days, but NHS staff have had between 35 to 41 days.

We are clearly not “all in it together”!

Austerity is a choice. Like the cuts to the NHS, the closures, and the privatisation agenda that has seen services sold off to private firms who lower conditions and the quality of care—the pay cap is about ensuring the rich can get richer while working class people are forced to pay for a crisis caused by the bosses and bankers.

The money is there

And as the bosses and Tories fight to defend the rate of their profits at the expense of our jobs, pay, services and conditions, they seek to divide us.

They scapegoat migrants and Muslims to divert the blame away from the real culprits.

But our NHS is the perfect anti-dote to this divisive racism—our health service was built on migrant labour, and is run today by migrant workers from all over the world.

That's why it was great to see NHS workers among the thousands marching on Stand Up To Racism mobilisations in London, Glasgow and Cardiff on 17 March, alongside demonstrations all over the world as part of UN anti-racism day.

NHS staff should take inspiration from the momentous strike by 40,000 UCU university workers, who have mobilised and organised from the bottom up in the union, with mass support from students and the public. UCU are fighting to defend their pensions, with slogans like “The money's there, where's our share?!”

With hundreds on picket lines and thousands on marches, they managed to stop their union leadership suspending action for a deal that falls short of what they are fighting for.

Their strike shows the potential our unions have to win serious victories when they lead combatative strikes mobilising their membership in a mass, active way.

In the NHS, workers need to organise across unions and pressure union leaders to coordinate action to fight for a real rise.

Time to fight

Let's organise hospital gate rallies, big open staffside meetings, petitions, take group selfies on wards—anything that can express the horror NHS workers feel at this pay proposal, and the determination to fight for better:

- at least RPI (currently 3.9%) for all
- no cut in annual leave

Any offer without this, as a minimum, should not be endorsed by the health unions. Every member should vote in any ballots and consultations to reject.

The political backdrop, with the rise in support for Corbyn's policies giving millions confidence in a real anti-austerity alternative, is very favourable for striking workers, as the UCU strike shows.

It's not so favourable for Tories and their rich privateer pals. Remember the incredible solidarity that existed around support for the junior doctors' strikes? Imagine how much greater this could be for an NHS strike now, after Grenfell, after the Carillion Collapse, and when millions are furious at the Tory slash and burn NHS policy. We can't wait till 2020.

With the Tories in deep crisis, and the rich as unpopular as ever, we need to send the message to our union leader—now's the time to fight. We can win.