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Britain

# A mixed week for strikes in Britain

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### **It has been another mixed week for the industrial struggle in Britain**

After the university lecturers' union, the UCU, called off strike action for 'intensive negotiations' there has been very little information about the content of those talks. It is certainly the case that left activists in the union remain furious about the decision organised over their head and mounted two lobbies last week of the union's headquarters in protest.

At the same time, the rush to 'talks' was catching. The nurses' Royal College of Nursing (RCN) who last week announced escalation, this week paused their action. General Secretary, Pat Cullen has got what has always seemed her wish by getting the nurses treated as a special case. The government invited them and them alone for discussions on Wednesday and again there is no news on what these might have involved.

Unison and GMB unions, who also have a small number of members who are nurses, have almost seemed radical in their response in comparison – not a common occurrence. The reality is they are jealous of the RCN – they want to be the ones cuddling up to the Tories.

But the depth of dissatisfaction with conditions for NHS workers was underlined by the very powerful results of the junior doctors' ballot announced this week. Around 40 per cent of doctors working in hospitals and public health are classed as 'junior' – it merely means they have not progressed to higher rungs of the profession as registrars or consultants.

The results saw 98 % voting for strike action with a turnout of 77.49 %. This was the largest ever turnout for a ballot of doctors and a record number of junior doctors voting for strike action. Their union, the British Medical Association (BMA) says they have suffered a 26% cut in pay in the past 15 years and have only been offered a miserly 2% pay rise at the beginning of the year. The impact of this is compounded by the stress of working for a collapsing NHS – not just because of the Covid pandemic but because of underfunding. And the union has shown its determination by calling a 72 hour strike from 13-15 March.

The other positive news during this week is the determined preparation by the teachers' National Education Union for further strike action. There were half-hearted attempts by the government to bribe them into calling off action planned in different areas of the country this coming week, but still made no promise to talk about a pay rise for the current year or to fund any offer.

The union's National Executive Committee (NEC) – the elected leadership – meeting on 25 February agreed that any future decision to suspend strike action for any reason will only be taken by a full meeting of the union's NEC and not just by its General Secretary/s. It further agreed that if the union's demands have not been achieved by the end of this school term, the NEC would bring a motion for escalating the action to their annual conference which always takes place at Easter.

This union has recruited 50,000 new members since their successful ballot in January and are organising local strike committees to involve members at the base and co-ordinate with other workers taking action. They along with a number of other unions are building hard for all out strike action and a national demonstration on 15 March

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