

Interview with striking British nurse, Matt Tacey.

Lene Junker

You voted for strike and it's the first time ever that the RCN members have been on strike. How did you win the majority of your colleges to vote for strike? What were the arguments?

"It is the first time in 106 years we have been on strike. The win has been a long hard fight over years. It's about having conversations, meetings, protests, training members. The cost of living has made some of the nurses wake up and realize how undervalued we all are by this Government. The argument was simple: we need to strike in order to improve patient care and safety. Low wage = staff leaving = care and safety compromised"

Some nurses were on strike in December - others, like you will go in January. What will happen then? What do you expect it will take to win fair pay?

"We have seen this is going to be a long, hard fight. This Government will not back down easily so we need to keep the pressure on and if we need to keep taking action, we will. I believe we are winning, the pressure being applied to the Government will make them back down, it is only a matter of time"

What about all the other workers in the NHS? How do you coordinate your struggle with them?

"So we have 13 health unions. Some unions are profession specific, for e.g. midwives have their own union, physios have their own union. It is difficult at times to successfully coordinate between unions as they have different demands and needs for their members. Most of the NHS staff don't view each of us depending on the union you are in. We are all one healthcare family working for the NHS and we all want the same end goal = improved pay, improved care and improved working conditions"

The crisis in the NHS is so huge, and thanks to your strikes, it is also an issue in the Danish media. There is a certain understanding/support for the strikes. The Danish nurse's strike was supported by a majority of the population, what about your strike?

"The majority of the country do support the nurses and the reasons why we are striking. It is publicly aired in the media how poor the NHS is currently however, it is always blamed on the lack of staff and lack of funding. There is always a very small proportion of ring wing journalists and their followers that attack us, but the support far, far outweighs the hostility"

There are quite a lot of strikes in Europe now mostly because of the cost of living crisis that hits the whole working class. Have you noticed any trends or mood for more unity in the struggles? If there is, how did you experience that?

"The first notable wave of strikes for us in the UK began with the The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) better known as "railway workers". They have been on strike and in dispute most of this year. I believe their fight gave other unions inspiration and motivation that this Government can be taken on

Following this, we've seen teachers, postal workers, university lecturers, the fire brigade amongst other unions take strike action. The support for each other, especially unions showing solidarity by attending pickets has really shocked and surprised this Government. The collective strength we are showing is frightening this Government.

Whether you work as a teacher, a nurse or a railway worker, we all have one thing in common, the Government does not care about us and we won't accept it"