

September 17<sup>th</sup> 2021

## **NURSES DISPLAY COURAGE UNDER PRESSURE TO PROTEST**

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### **Introduction**

The attempts by the Public Service Union to plunge this country into chaos and disfunction even in the most challenging times in recent years have failed. Their call for protests on the streets of Kingstown, but most interestingly their call for medical personnel to withdraw their services for 4 days had many right-thinking persons questioning the call of the Union and the judgement of their leaders. One leading member of the nursing fraternity stated publicly that she would love if ALL nurses withdrew their services for the 4-day period. The call for a withdrawal of service by nurses during a pandemic, as countries around us experience situations that have overwhelmed their health system to the point of crippling them, have been widely described as being irresponsible and reckless. The leadership of the Public Service Union, saw no difficulty in advancing such a call, and those opposed to vaccines used every opportunity to stir up emotions using conspiracy theories, misinformation and flat-out lies. The nurses were fed a barrage of mis-information regarding the regulation, a pretext used as the catalyst to promote the protest action, with the mischaracterisation of it being anti-democratic and anti-freedom being the major narrative. The health authorities braced for the worst, putting contingencies in place in preparation for the protest action by nurses, even as comrade Ralph urged the nurses to show up to work. Many services including elective surgeries were suspended at the MCMH and other health facilities for the time period of the industrial action. In the meantime, the draft regulation that was touted as the source of protest was published for public consultations and comments from stakeholders. The Public Service Union through their legal advisors has indicated that it intends to take the government to court over the regulation, but has not stated whether they submitted any comments to the AG's chambers. It begs the question that many are asking: Is the regulation really the issue behind the actions proposed by the PSU?

## **Nurses Show Commitment to Duty**

From all reports, the call by the Public Service Union to nurses to forsake their oath, and abandon their duty to patients and to our health system, during the most deadly pandemic in the last 100 years did not receive much support. Figures by the very union showed that close to 80% of nurses showed up for duty over the 4-day period allowing for services to be delivered at hospitals and other health facilities across the country. The nurses must be thanked and commended for their commitment shown to their patients and to this country during this very challenging time. It is also commendable that more nurses have decided to take the vaccine as front-line workers to protect themselves, their families and by extension our society. In the aftermath of the failed protest action, those who hoped for chaos and mayhem vented their frustration and disgust as the nurses and by extension the public servants referring to them as ungrateful, spineless, weak and puppets. Their anger directed at the nurses and public servants as expressed included their disdain for what they perceive to be the influence of Comrade Ralph. It is true that our Comrade Prime Minister spoke directly to public servants and nurses asking them to turn up to work, it is also true that it is under the leadership of Comrade Ralph, that the public servants including nurses have experienced their best working conditions. Whether or not these truths impacted the decision of nurses to turn up to work ignoring the reckless call of the union to try and cripple the health system speaks to the conscience of each individual. But it must never be overlooked in all this that the nurses held true to their oath as health care professionals and showed commitment at the time that it matters most, and for this we owe them a debt of gratitude.

## **Mayhem at the Protest**

As was expected, the opposition NDP came into Kingstown fully intended to hijack the action called by the PSU and use it for political gain. To be sure, it was already clear that some elements in the PSU's

leadership and membership were doing the bidding of the NDP and were allowing the long-standing union of public workers to be used to fulfil its political agenda. Ever since the proclamation by the PSU president in the run up to the 2020 General Elections where he urged his members to vote NDP, there has appeared an apparent partnership between the PSU and the NDP to pressure the government for fresh elections. Despite of the clear conditions set out by the Commissioner of Police regarding the picket in Kingstown, the protestors again sort to block roads, impede traffic and got extremely aggressive. Protesters got into open confrontation with the police with one protestor who was subsequently arrested, seen on video to strike a police officer in the face. Video evidence showed the police exercising restraint when the protestors became extremely unruly and some persons were seen trying to stir up emotions and get protesters into a frenzy. By his own admission, the President of the PSU had to call the police on protestors who he believed were breaching the conditions set out by the COP regarding the Protest. While the protestors were not allowed to take things to the point they did on August 5, 2021, they pushed it to the limit, doing their best to keep the peaceful out of the protest in an attempt to gain attention from an uninterested public. This may not be the last we see of the NDP and their attempts to use others to achieve their ends, but one thing this is clear: they are getting less and less traction.

## **Conclusion**

We end where we started by commending the public service and specifically the nurses, for their courage to show unwavering commitment to duty, in the face of much misinformation, lies and intimidation by those who wish to see our health system crippled to achieve their political agendas.