

Security guards attack striking San Francisco hospital workers

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On October 13, security personnel hired by Sutter California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco physically attacked 200 striking Sutter Hospital workers and their supporters. According to strikers, dozens of security guards began pushing and shoving after strikers confronted a bus of replacement workers. When strikers pushed back, guards beat and kicked them.

One guard began kicking Loreнна Hernandez, a dietary aide on strike, while she lay on the ground. Said Hernandez, "The security guards were out of control. I was on the picket line, and security starting shoving us off the sidewalk. I fell to the ground and one of the guards kept kicking me in the stomach." Hernandez was hospitalized.

Since the strike began on September 12, Steele Foundation guards have spit on, shoved, sexually harassed, and threatened nursing assistants, licensed vocational nurses and other hospital caregivers. On October 12, over 70 Steele personnel attacked a largely female group of protesting caregivers.

"We were just walking on the picket line and security started running toward us. They told us we needed to get off the sidewalk, but it is our legal right. Besides, there was fast traffic on the street," said Maria Salina, a central distribution aide at the hospital "They started pushing us, shoving me hard in my shoulder and neck."

On September 3, Service Employees International Union—United Healthcare Workers (SEIU-UHW) West Local 250 gave a 10-day strike notice to eight hospitals operated by Sutter Health where contracts had expired, including California Pacific Medical Center, Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in Oakland and Berkeley, St. Luke's Hospital in San Francisco and Eden Medical Center in Castro Valley. But union officials decided to limit the strike to California Pacific Medical Center,

where 800 licensed vocational nurses, dietary workers, custodians and clerks then walked off the job.

California Pacific has hired 600 agency workers to replace striking workers. The hospital also employs 400 direct care nurses represented by the California Nurses Association. Several of the nurses have refused to cross the picket line.

Contract talks ended weeks ago. The dispute is not over wage demands, but principally over Sutter's refusal to adopt union-promulgated standards for patient care that have been adopted by dozens of other Northern California hospitals.

The standards require union input into staffing decisions to assure patient safety, and increased funding for training and education of workers to insure quality care. The standards also call for guarantees of the right to organize free from interference and intimidation by management.

On August 28 a federal mediator, David Weinberg, recommended a settlement for a contract through June 2008. The mediator adopted Sutter's pension proposal and its position that a single contract should not cover all Sutter-operated hospitals.

As to the training issue, Sutter would participate in the SEIU-UHW Joint Employer Training & Upgrade Fund, on whose board a Sutter representative would sit, with employees reimbursed up to \$1,000 per year for training tuition. The parties would agree to third-party arbitration of any staffing issues.

The mediator's proposal also called for an election at each hospital, supervised by the National Labor Relations Board, and without employer coercion or interference with organizing efforts.

Union negotiators immediately accepted the mediator's proposal, but Sutter rejected it. The union's strike notice followed shortly thereafter.

Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union, told strikers at a recent rally that they have the “full support” of the 1.8 million SEIU members across the country, and he pledged \$250,000 (just over \$300 per striker) per week to help strikers until a settlement is reached. But the union bureaucracy has already weakened the strike considerably by limiting it to one hospital location.



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