

One-day strike by Minnesota nurses to defend patient care

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Over 12,000 Minnesota registered nurses walked off the job June 10 in an effort to defend working conditions and improve patient safety. The strike by members of the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) at fourteen Minneapolis-St. Paul-area hospitals is the largest strike by nurses in US history.

Nurses are determined to halt the drive by six Minnesota hospital systems to increase patient workloads as management seeks higher profits that threaten to further deteriorate patient safety. During the course of negotiations, the hospitals have refused to discuss any of the nurses' proposals to establish safe nurse-to-patient ratios. Instead, hospitals, under the demand for "flexibility," are seeking to destroy the limited ability of nurses to control the number of patients that are placed under their care.

Jean Forman, a nurse with nearly 15 years who works at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis told the WSWs that the hospitals' drive for increased flexibility at the expense of patient safety is "part of managements' policy of taking acceptable risks in order to make profits. There's a lot of greed involved. It's no different than what BP did in the Gulf of Mexico. Cutting corners there blew up in their face and they're trying to cover it up. The acceptable risk policy of hospitals is no different."

On May 19, Nurses voted by more than 90 percent to reject hospital demands for increased productivity and other concessions. Among them are demands to slash pensions by up to one-third, a doubling in the number of days that management can unilaterally cancel shifts

at the last minute, and cutting back on the ability of part-time nurses to qualify for benefits. An additional two negotiating sessions failed to bridge the wide gap leading to nurses launching their one-day strike.

The one-day strike in Minnesota was to have been accompanied by a strike of 13,000 nurses in California, but a judge blocked the action. Nurses in California, Minnesota and other states are affiliated under the umbrella organization National Nurses United, which has supported the Democratic Party and the Obama administration's health care "reform." The health care overhaul is being used by the hospitals to streamline their operations and attack nurses' conditions.

The WSWs will provide additional coverage of the nurses June 10 walkout in a follow-up article.



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