

# Maine hospital locks out nurses in response to one-day strike

Our reporter

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After months of fruitless contract negotiations between nurses and the hospital administration at Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor, management launched a preemptive three-day lockout in response to plans by the nurses for a one-day strike.

The nurses' one-day strike took place as scheduled on Monday, November 22. Hundreds of nurses and their supporters picketed, many carrying signs stating "Patients Before Profits" in snow flurries that later turned to rain.

The nurses union has been negotiating for a new contract since last July. Wages are reportedly not a major issue, but management has refused to consider proposals for increased staffing and improvements in job security. Management demands for concessions on health care coverage is another contract issue.

Nurses have complained that low nurse-to-patient staffing levels have made care for patients increasingly difficult and dangerous. Several nurses told the WSWS that staffing decisions are made without input from or explanation to the nurses who must care for the patients. There are numerous instances of nurses being assigned several acute cases and then being handed additional assignments. They fear reprisal if they protest, including being charged with "unprofessional conduct."

With 1,000 nurses, including 830 who are union members, EMMC is the second largest hospital in the state of Maine and among the largest employers in the state as well.

The planned strike was turned by hospital management into a three-day lockout, which began in the early morning of Saturday, November 20. The nurses had been sent letters warning them that any attempt to enter the hospital would result in charges of

trespassing.

Management had planned the lockout over a period of weeks. A total of 215 nurses were hired to replace the locked out workers, including many who have worked at the medical center for decades. Hospital administration increased security around the medical center, and also mobilized the support of other medical institutions, arranging for the diversion of ambulance calls to other hospitals.

The Bangor nurses are members of the Maine State Nurses Association, which is affiliated to National Nurses United. The NNU, officially formed about one year ago, represents the effort of the 86,000-member California State Nurses Association to expand its membership among the three million registered nurses throughout the US. The new organization claims about 155,000 members, and has been involved in a number of one-day strikes around the country that have highlighted demands for increased staffing. An affiliate of the AFL-CIO, the nurses union has followed the policy of lobbying the big business politicians, slavish support for the Democrats and acceptance of the for-profit health care system.



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