

Mobilize the working class to defend the Johns Hopkins Hospital workers!

A secure and decent-paying job is a social right!

Socialist Equality Party
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On Saturday workers from Johns Hopkins Hospital (JHH) are rallying to protest the impossibly low wages being paid to maintenance workers, janitors, technical workers, kitchen staff and other non-nursing employees. The rally was called after contract negotiations broke down between the SEIU 1199 United Healthcare Workers East union and hospital representatives over a week ago.

Non-nursing staff members have been laboring without a contract after the SEIU shut down a brief strike last month without any gains. The workers currently make as low as \$10.71 an hour. In the Washington-Baltimore metropolitan area—one of the most expensive regions in the country to live—this relegates workers to poverty conditions, forcing many to rely on food stamps and other government aid to survive.

SEIU has raised the demand that non-nursing faculty members with more than 15 years' experience receive a wage of \$15 an hour, with less-experienced workers making at least \$14 by the end of the proposed four-year contract. The union has acknowledged that as few as 15-20 workers out of several thousand JHH faculty members would actually qualify for the \$15 wage. The rest, earning the SEIU's supposedly "Fair Wage" of \$14 an hour, would be left with such low pay they would still qualify for food stamps.

Workers need and must have a genuine living wage. According to a study conducted by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a family of four would need to earn at least \$88,000 a year to live in normal conditions in the Washington, DC area.

Management at the \$6.5 billion JHH health system insists there is only a "finite pool of funds" and is only

able pay a minimum wage of \$12.50 with an additional two percent increase over a five-year period. This is under conditions in which Johns Hopkins Medicine (JHM) sits on an operating surplus of more than \$145 million. Moreover, the 'non-profit' hospital, which takes in billions in corporate contracts and government subsidies, continues to shower its top executives with some of the highest salaries of any university leaders in the country.

While hospital workers are determined to fight, the SEIU is neither willing nor capable of waging a genuine struggle. The union officials accept without question the "right" of a handful of giant hospital chains, insurance companies, pharmaceutical monopolies and other corporate interests to control the health care system. The SEIU and other unions are allied with the Obama administration and backs his Affordable Care Act, which has further enriched private insurers and forced workers to foot the bill for inferior care.

One of the main tenets of the ACA is to streamline costs by tearing up the conditions of health care workers, wiping out thousands of jobs and imposing poverty level wages. That is what is behind the nationwide assault on health care workers, including at the University of California.

Far from fighting these attacks the SEIU has been complicit. In 2011, the SEIU was one of the first unions to endorse Barack Obama's re-election bid, with union head Mary Kay Henry calling it "an act of solidarity with the 99% movement," in reference to the Occupy Wall Street protests of that year. In fact, Obama, just like his Republican predecessor, has been a tool of Wall Street and the super-rich.

After bailing out the banks, the Obama administration slashed wages of auto workers at GM and Chrysler and has made low-paying, temporary jobs, with few if any benefits the centerpiece of his so-called economic recovery. While Wall Street speculators have been given trillions through “quantitative easing” and the stock market has reached record levels, the White House has joined with the Republicans to slash food stamps, long-term unemployment benefits and destroy the pensions of public employees.

These pro-corporate policies have led to the greatest transfer of wealth to the top in US history. Since 2009, 95 percent of all income gains in the US have gone to the richest one percent of the population. Meanwhile, wages have fallen to the lowest portion of US economic output since World War II.

The struggle for decent paying and secure jobs, guaranteed health care and other essential social rights pits workers against the entire economic and political set up. The capitalist profit system is based on the enrichment of a tiny minority through the exploitation and impoverishment of the working class—the overwhelming majority of the population. The richest 85 people—all billionaires—control more wealth than the bottom half of the world’s population—3.5 billion people!

JHH workers cannot fight this battle alone. A genuine struggle requires the broadest mobilization of the entire working class. Hospital workers must turn out to municipal workers in Baltimore, young people facing crushing student loan debts and a future of poverty wage jobs and every other section of working people. An industrial and political struggle must be waged to break the dictatorship of the corporate and financial elite and reorganize society on the basis of social equality and meeting the needs of the majority, not the wealthy few.

The SEIU defends the capitalist system and is opposed to anything that would undermine its cozy relations with hospital management and the Democratic Party. That is why JHH workers must take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the SEIU and organize rank-and-file committees to appeal for the widest support in the working class to defend JHH workers.

To carry out this struggle workers require a new political perspective and organization. The Socialist

Equality Party calls for a complete break from the Democratic Party—the party of austerity, social attacks, war and domestic spying—and the formation of a mass political movement of the working class to fight for the socialist reorganization of society. We urge JHH workers to contact the SEP.



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