

Nurses unions shut down emerging strike wave

Eric London
27 June 2016

Nurses unions across the country are shutting down a series of key strikes by thousands of nurses, in some cases calling the strikes off before they have even begun. Thirteen hundred nurses at Kaiser Permanente's Los Angeles Medical Center will return to work without a contract on Monday after the four-day strike ended on Sunday. LAMC workers have been working without a contract for six years.

In Minneapolis, the Minnesota Nurses Association is sending 5,000 nurses back to work without a contract. In both Los Angeles and Minneapolis, nurses have gone on strike against unsafe staffing levels, skyrocketing corporate profits, and dangerous cost-cutting that harms patient care.

In Watsonville, California, the California Nurses Association called off a planned two-day strike of 300 nurses, announcing a tentative agreement on June 22 that forces nurses to return to work before voting on the deal.

In Boston, the Massachusetts Nurses Association blocked a strike by 3,330 nurses at Brigham and Women's Hospital. The corporation said they were "extremely pleased" with the tentative agreement, which was reached by the MNA after a 15-hour bargaining session announced the day before the strike was set to begin. MNA Chair Trish Powers said she was "so proud" and "so happy" that "we avoided this strike," but did not explain why nurses should support a deal that the corporation is "extremely pleased" with.

The nurses unions' moves to halt the strike movement exposes the fact that the union does not represent the interests of nurses, and is only trying to keep "peace" between the multi-million dollar company and its exploited workforce. In announcing beforehand that the strikes would last only two, four, and seven days in Watsonville, Los Angeles, and

Minneapolis, the union allowed the companies to plan around the strikes with minimal profit loss.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with nurses on the picket line who expressed a deep desire to continue their struggle against the health conglomerates.

Xochitl, a nurse with 31 years of service, said:

"This nursing strike is part of a bigger labor movement sweeping across America." Speaking before the strikes were brought to a halt, she said, "Currently there are 10,000 RNs all across America standing up for safe patient care and against the greed of corporate health care."

Many nurses on the picket line had traveled from the Bay Area, some 300 miles away, to support their Southern California counterparts.

"Our brothers and sisters are not getting respect from Kaiser," said Joseph, a nurse from Northern California, who said that alongside grievances like short-staffing and cost-cutting, many nurses are frustrated that health care is not free and universal for all: "A lot of patients come to a point where they decide, 'do I live or do I die' because they can't afford to buy their medication. We're supposed to be the best country in the world, but that's a lie, because people—including veterans—can't afford to live."

Another Northern California nurse, April, said: "Kaiser makes billions. Health care should be a human right. Just because you don't have money doesn't mean your life should be less valuable than a millionaire's. When a homeless person comes into the hospital, we give him the same treatment and care that we would give a CEO."

Many nurses expressed this sentiment, which reveals as lies the claims by Kaiser that nurses are selfish and are harming patient care by going on strike.

Adam and April both stated they were elected

Democratic Party delegates who were strong supporters of Bernie Sanders. Adam, like many workers across the country, said he cannot support Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump in November's presidential election, and would still refuse to vote for Clinton even if Sanders made his endorsement formal.

Xochitl, who works at LAMC, pointed to police lingering by the picket line, and said, "Even though they say this is the land of the free, the US is instrumental in suppressing labor around the world. It is disgusting and it all takes place under the pretense of the flag." Xochitl explained that the struggle of nurses against Kaiser was "not just a US problem but a global phenomenon."

Xochitl, like many nurses, has followed closely the massacre carried out in the Mexican state of Oaxaca this month of striking teachers fighting to defend the right to public education: "Look at what's happening in Oaxaca," Xochitl said. "You get killed for protesting."

Another nurse, Gina, said: "We are one step from being like Mexicans. These corporations will resort to violence against us. I saw the violent acts the teachers had to face in Oaxaca." Gina is also following the US elections, and said "I would only vote for Clinton with Sanders as her vice president. She is going to lead us into war."

The comments of nurses who are following international developments, and are eager to put an end to social inequality, give a sense of the role of the trade unions in attempting to direct these sentiments back into the Democratic Party. But nurses are coming into conflict with the attempts to block their struggle against corporations like Kaiser, Allina, and Brigham and Women's.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)