

Minnesota nurses strike highlights militant mood of US workers

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Nearly 5,000 nurses are continuing to walk the picket lines at five hospitals in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area in Minnesota. The strike, now in its third day, highlights the sharp class tensions in the United States on the eve of the 2016 presidential elections and the growing mood of militancy in the working class.

The nurses have repeatedly rejected concession demands by Allina Health, which is seeking, like so many other US employers, to force workers into inferior healthcare plans with higher out-of-pocket costs. Striking workers also want to reduce dangerously high patient-to-nurse ratios and stop management from piling on more work responsibilities on an understaffed workforce. The company's demands are in line with the cost-cutting drive at the heart of Obama's misnamed Affordable Care Act (ACA).

The strike erupted despite the best efforts of the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) and a federal mediator dispatched by the Obama administration. The union offered to give into Allina's major demand to replace four union-backed health plans with the company's in-house plan—if only Allina made a conciliatory gesture in order to sell the agreement to resistant workers. Although all nurses in the Twin Cities face the same struggle, the MNA is keeping another 7,000 nurses in the largest hospitals on the job.

The capitulation of the union has only emboldened Allina, which planned for a walkout for months and has hired a small army of strikebreakers from around the country to maintain operations. Allina's intransigence is not the product simply of multi-millionaires like Penny Wheeler who run the "non-profit" hospital, but also powerful financial interests that want to get their hands on millions of dollars in healthcare benefits.

Over the last decade, US Bank entangled Allina in interest rate swaps and other financial swindles and is

now extracting millions of dollars each year from the hospital chain. The top six executives at the bank made more than \$30 million combined in executive compensation last year—three times the annual savings Allina is seeking by stripping nurses of affordable healthcare.

With nine weeks to go before Election Day, both Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump are offering tens of millions of workers no relief from the relentless destruction of their living standards. The billionaire real estate mogul is demanding even more corporate tax cuts and the lifting of virtually all regulations on big business. Hillary Clinton is a warmonger and the favored candidate of Wall Street whose husband oversaw the deregulation of the finance industry that led to the crash of 2008.

During the last two weeks of August alone, Clinton raked in roughly \$50 million—or \$150,000 an hour—at 22 fundraising events in the Hamptons, Martha's Vineyard, Beverly Hills and Silicon Valley, according to an article in the *New York Times* titled, "Where Has Hillary Clinton Been? Ask the Ultrarich."

Since taking office nearly eight years ago, President Obama has overseen the greatest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top in US history, with the richest 1 percent capturing 95 percent of all income gains since the so-called recovery began. The bank bailouts and free money policies of the Obama administration have led to a tripling of the value of the stock market even as workers have seen their wages stagnate or fall, student loan and household debt rise to crushing levels, and the cost of healthcare and their meager pension benefits shifted onto their already overburdened shoulders.

While tens of millions face economic insecurity, Corporate America is sitting on an estimated cash

hoard of \$1.9 trillion and is squandering billions on stock buybacks, dividend payments and mergers and acquisitions that destroy thousands of jobs and only benefit wealthy investors and executives.

Shortly after taking office in 2009, Obama met with CEOs from Xerox, AT&T, Honeywell, Coke and other top Fortune 500 corporations. He praised the “change in corporate culture” in the 1980s that “significantly boosted corporate productivity for a long time and helped create the boom of the 90s,” in a reference to the union-busting, deindustrialization and brutal attacks on the working class of the Reagan years. Obama pledged to work with the corporate executives to “introduce the same sort of productivity” in the healthcare industry, education and the rest of the public sector.

Regardless of who wins the election—Clinton or Trump—the war against the working class in the United States will be escalated in conjunction with the expansion of imperialist wars to grab markets, resources and new areas of cheap labor around the world.

The last year has been marked by increasing resistance of the working class in the United States, which has coincided with the growth of the class struggle in Europe, Latin America and Asia, including last week’s general strike by tens of millions of Indian workers.

In early 2015, thousands of oil workers in the US struck followed by the bitter lockout of 20,000 West Coast dockworkers and 2,200 steelworkers at Allegheny Technologies. In September 2015, autoworkers rebelled against the sellout contracts pushed by the United Auto Workers (UAW) and defeated the first UAW-backed national contract in 33 years. This was followed by sickouts by Detroit teachers carried out in defiance of their union, and then the nearly two-month strike by 39,000 Verizon telecom workers.

In each case, the AFL-CIO and other unions, working with the Obama administration, isolated and betrayed these struggles, but opposition continued to emerge again and again. On Tuesday, hundreds of teachers packed into a union meeting on the first day of school to listen to the sellout agreement reached by the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) and the new Detroit Community Schools District, which is essentially run by the banks and proponents of school privatization.

Opposition arose to the DFT’s demands that teachers, who have suffered years of wage and benefit cuts, accept one-time bonuses.

The Minnesota nurses strike is just one indication of the reemergence of the class struggle, which has been artificially suppressed by the pro-capitalist and nationalist trade unions for so long. The mass support for Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders was a sign of the growth of anti-capitalist sentiment and political radicalization that will continue despite Sanders’ efforts to channel opposition behind Clinton.

The sleeping giant of American politics—the working class—is beginning to emerge. It is this immense social force, guided by a revolutionary party and united with its class brothers and sisters around the world in the fight for socialism, which will put an end to capitalism, the source of war and social inequality.



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