

“Health care is a human right”

Minneapolis students express support for striking Allina nurses

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Nearly 5,000 nurses in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro region in Minnesota are entering their fourth day of an open-ended strike against Allina Health. The nurses have repeatedly voted down demands by the hospital that they take deep cuts to their health care and accept more work responsibilities for an understaffed workforce.

The Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) union has responded to the nurses’ determination to fight with its own efforts to isolate the struggle, even as its outcome will set a precedent for attacks on the health care of workers across the state and nationally. As management continues operations with the use of strikebreakers, the union is keeping other nurses throughout the region on the job and is doing nothing to mobilize broader support in the working class.

Before the strike began, the MNA agreed to Allina’s major demand: to replace union-backed health care plans with the company’s own plan, a move aimed at cutting health care costs. These concessions were rejected by the company as insufficient, however, forcing the union to call an open-ended strike.

At a press conference on Tuesday, MNA officials appealed to the company to accept its proposal.

On Wednesday, the MNA issued a press release declaring that it was “requesting to present [the] case for a fair contract directly to the Allina Health Board of Directors.” It expressed the concern that the company’s negotiating team was “not delivering accurate information to the hospital leadership of the board, which is prolonging the strike.”

In other words, if the Board of Directors only knew how much the MNA was willing to give up, they would agree to the terms proposed and end the strike. The

MNA said that it was spending an unspecified amount of money on social media ads targeting individual board members, including “[John] Church, a vice president at General Mills; Mark Jordahl, president of US Bank Wealth Management; Debra Schoneman, chief financial officer for Piper Jaffray; and Sally Smith, chief executive officer at Buffalo Wild Wings.”

US Bank has over the past several years entangled Allina in various interest rate swaps and is taking in millions of dollars each year from the hospital chain.

These moves are aimed at sowing fatal illusions among nurses that their interests can be secured by desperate appeals to the various corporate executives that dominate Allina’s Board of Directors, even as the MNA prepares a complete sell-out. Above all, the union wants to prevent an appeal to the social force that must be mobilized if the struggle is to succeed: the working class as a whole.

On Wednesday, the WSWWS spoke with students at the University of Minnesota about the nurses’ struggle. They expressed overwhelming support for the effort of the nurses to defend their health care and conditions, and to defend health care as a whole.

Urso, an electrical engineering student in Minneapolis, when told about what nurses were facing, said, “That’s messed up... When I think of health care, I think that it is something everyone should have; it’s a basic human right.”

Sam, another student at the University of Minnesota, said he agreed with the need to unite the working class behind the nurses, adding, “Some of my friends are nurses, and we’ve all been at a hospital at some point in our lives. I’m all for the nurses; they do the work of doctors, but for cheaper—they deserve the benefits.”

Sam also emphasized that health care is an issue facing the entire working class.

Chelsea said, “Universal health care is a human right.”

Mitch, a student studying mechanical engineering, said, “Nurses have a right to health care; they should have a choice.”

Instead of appealing to the working class for support, the MNA has continued its effort to subordinate the nurses to the Democratic Party. This was expressed in the invitation of various AFL-CIO functionaries and Democratic Party state representative Keith Ellison to their August 31st “Solidarity Rally.”

The National Nurses United (NNU), the parent organization of the MNA, has thus far refrained from following the example of every other major labor union in endorsing Hillary Clinton, the Democratic Party nominee for president. During the primary process, the NNU endorsed Clinton’s rival Bernie Sanders, but this was just another way of channeling the anger and opposition of nurses back into the Democratic Party.

Even as Sanders made clear that he would eventually endorse Clinton, the NNU and its executive director, RoseAnn Demoro, continued to voice support for Sanders. From the beginning, the purpose of the Sanders campaign was to preempt an independent political movement of the working class and direct it into the right-wing, pro-war presidential campaign, which is what Sanders has now done.

If the strike is not to be defeated, nurses must take the initiative and form independent committees to broaden the struggle into all sections of the working class across the state and nationally. Nurses should appeal to the other 7,000 MNA organized nurses and all health care workers to join them, along with construction workers, teachers, transit and all other sections of workers in the Twin Cities and throughout Minnesota.



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