

Allina Health, media, join forces to break Twin Cities nurses as union isolates strike

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10 September 2016

As the strike by 4,800 nurses in the Twin Cities Minnesota region enters its sixth day, the media and the company, Allina Health, are engaged in concerted action aimed at demoralizing nurses. The Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) and the AFL-CIO trade unions, meanwhile, are continuing to isolate the strike while issuing furtive appeals to the company's board of directors to accept the concessions contract the MNA has already proposed.

The company is seeking to highlight the actions of a small minority of nurses who have reportedly crossed the picket lines, joining 1,500 replacement workers that Allina has hired to continue operations. "The more nurses who commit to working during the strike, the more pressure will be placed on the union to reach an agreement," Allina declared in a statement issued on Friday. "Hundreds of Allina Health nurses systemwide have made the choice to work rather than strike."

The *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* has thrown open its pages to Allina, quoting company claims that the number of nurses crossing the picket line "continues to climb by the hour." WCCO radio's web site interviewed a nurse who crossed the picket line and titled their story, "Some Allina Nurses Standing Up Against Strike."

Minnesota Public Radio also gave a sympathetic interview to another nurse who crossed the picket line. It attempted to create the image of a company that cannot be defeated: "While Allina spent \$20 million on temporary staffing for the nurses' seven-day strike in June, it has cash on hand to stay open about 200 days without additional revenue. And its leaders have said they are willing to take a short-term financial hit in exchange for the long-term savings of moving nurses onto more financially advantageous health plans."

The media is accurate in acknowledging that Allina,

backed by the banks, insurance and pharmaceutical companies, is out to strip nurses of their four health care plans and move them to inferior corporate plans, resulting in a transfer of \$10 million a year in savings into the pockets of the company.

However, in ignoring the sentiments of nurses who are on strike, the media is seeking to undermine the struggle. All other hospital chains in the Twin Cities and throughout the state and region await with anticipation any wounds inflicted on the Allina nurses and will follow in Allina's footsteps.

Nancy, a striking nurse, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "With the media coverage about nurses crossing the picket, I think that they [Allina Health] are going to wait it out until October to wear the nurses down." Nurses on strike will lose all health care coverage in October.

"They say 15 percent of nurses are crossing at Unity. That's one hospital. Most of us are still fighting."

The actions of the company are complemented by the MNA and AFL-CIO. In isolating the strike, the unions are seeking to wear down the opposition of nurses and prepare them to accept the attack on their health care that the union already agreed to before the strike began.

Prior to launching the strike on Monday, MNA negotiators expressed surprise that Allina did not agree to a proposal that accepted the company's main demand: the transfer of nurses' health care to an inferior company-run plan.

On Friday, MNA leaders continued to plead with the company's board of directors—which is dominated by corporate CEOs—to meet with the union and discuss an end to the strike. "I hope they actually want a contract with us," said Angela Becchetti, an MNA negotiator. "I hope they give us time at their next meeting to actually hear from us."

MNA President Rose Roach also sent a letter to US Bank asking for a meeting. US Bank, according to research on the MNA web site, received \$121 million in business from the investment firm Piper Jaffray to refinance bonds that Allina was caught holding in the 2008 banking collapse. US Bank's Chief Investment Officer, Mark Jordahl, sits on Allina's board of directors.

The purpose of the meeting is spelled out in the title of an article on the MNA website: "MNA Requests Meeting with US Bank in order to Save Allina Money."

The MNA's strike fund, if divided among the striking nurses, would amount to less than \$1,000 per nurse. In a drawn-out strike, this would do little to meet car payments, mortgages and other family expenses. The AFL-CIO and Change to Win labor federations and their member unions, meanwhile, have no intention of making available their sizable assets, which could weather the nurses through.

This is in line with the response of the unions to any struggle by workers. They do everything they can to prevent a fight against the corporations. When they are forced to call a strike, their aim is to wear workers out, the better to force through concessions.

The linchpin of the labor bureaucracy's subordination of the working class to capitalism is its support for the Democrat Party. The MNA hailed the empty proclamations of sympathy for workers from more than 100 Democrats, but nothing has come of this. In reality, the Democratic Party, led by the Obama administration, has been at the forefront of the attack on health care and the rights of the working class as a whole.

Nurses and workers who realize that their continued isolation represents a danger to the strike must sound the alarm. An emergency meeting of striking nurses must be called to elect a rank-and-file committee to appeal to the working class of the Twin Cities and Minnesota for a common struggle against the corporate-backed attack on health care and all the rights of the working class.



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