

Pittsburgh nurses express support for striking Allina nurses in Minnesota

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Nurses and other healthcare workers at the University of Pittsburgh-Medical Center (UPMC) have expressed their solidarity with the strike by 4,800 nurses at Allina Health in the Twin Cities area of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota. The Allina nurses are in the second week of a fight against the attack on their health benefits and demands that they accept dangerously high numbers of patients.

While the nurses have remained determined in the face of strikebreaking and intimidation by the company, the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) and the AFL-CIO and Change to Win labor federations have isolated the struggle. Allied with the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, the unions are doing everything to prevent a movement of the working class in defense of health benefits, which have been under unrelenting attack by the Obama administration.

When *World Socialist Web Site* reporters told UPMC healthcare workers about the Allina nurses strike, they expressed overwhelming support.

Donna, a retired nurse from UPMC, explained the conditions nurses face. “I worked as a nurse for 40 years, and the way nurses are treated, it’s terrible. I don’t think I could work in a hospital ever again. Most nurses now in the OR [operating room] have to work 12-hour shifts, and I hated it. Others have to be on call. They have families, and it’s just too hard.”

Speaking of the rich healthcare profiteers, Donna added, “Where are they getting the money? They’re getting the money from the working class, and from the government, so in the long run, working people lose all the way around.”

Donna expressed frustration with the wage tiers imposed on newer nurses designed to divide the workforce. “What frustrated me more than anything is

when they kicked out the older nurses, and more new nurses came in... The administration didn’t care, as long as the newer nurses were being paid cheaper wages, but a lot of mistakes were being made.

“They gave me a buyout, which was nothing, like throwing pennies at me after being a nurse for 40 years. It was \$15,000, and when they took out the taxes, it was \$8,000. And they told me I couldn’t work for UPMC anymore. If I had the possibility to work a couple days, I would have.”

When a WSWs reporter explained the attacks on Allina nurses, Tiffany, a dental student in Pittsburgh, responded, “I think that’s pretty ridiculous that they’re trying to take away their healthcare. I think it’s not fair.”

“I applaud them,” Michael, a nurse from Pittsburgh, said of the striking Allina nurses. “Being a nurse, we often go without breaks. I know a lot of nurses don’t use the restroom all shift, whether it’s an eight or 12-hour shift. Rarely do I get a lunch. I’m never officially relieved. I have a couple chugs of milk and a few heaping spoons of peanut butter, and that gets me through the shift.”

Speaking to Allina nurses’ demands for lower staffing ratios, Michael continued, “I would say one of the biggest things in the nature of nursing is that you have human safety at play, which is what surrounds safe staffing ratios.”

Upon hearing that the MNA had called out only 5,000 of 12,000 nurses in the area, Michael replied, “The unions basically are bought out, and they basically do serve the owners and the ruling elite. They seek in every way to circumvent the interests of the workers.

“On the form, I’m a registered nurse, but we’re considered management. I manage some other nurses, and sometimes they manage me. Because of that, I’m

separated from the union. It's one of the mechanisms they use to keep us divided on the battlefield.”

Michael made comments on the role of the unions, stating, “Most of the things that they step in for aren't wages and benefits. It's people being late for work. It's been pretty petty concerns, and not the big stuff, like where did our pensions go? I think that's all part of where the unions sold out. Why wouldn't they value these bigger things?”

Speaking of the irrationality of for-profit healthcare, Michael noted, “The prices never go down. It's a dictatorship of a marketplace, they basically hold people's health and welfare hostage, and charge whatever they want to charge.”

Acknowledging the media blackout of the strike, Michael said, “In our free society, which we supposedly have, it's not being covered anywhere except the *World Socialist Web Site*, and I thank you for that.”

Speaking to Allina nurses, Michael continued, “I greatly applaud the Minnesota nurses for having some backbone and leading the way. They have my admiration and the support of, I'm sure, countless nurses nationwide. I wholeheartedly support their commitment and drive. We've been conned. There's enough to go around for everybody in this country.”



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