

Sanders covers for union isolation of Minnesota nurses' strike

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On the picket lines at five Allina Health hospitals in the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota area, rank-and-file nurses are engaged in intense discussions on how to take their struggle forward. Nearly 5,000 nurses walked out on September 5 to oppose the hospital chain's demands to destroy their long-standing health care benefits and increase the workloads on the already overstretched hospital staff.

While nurses remained determined to beat back Allina Health and the powerful corporate and financial interests behind it, the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA), its parent union, National Nurses United (NNU), and the national union federations have left the nurses to fight this battle alone. The MNA has ordered some 7,000 of its members at other area hospitals to remain on the job.

Well aware of the role of the MNA—which has already offered to accept the company's major concession demands—Allina executives have remained intransigent while bringing in 1,500 strikebreakers to keep operations going.

On Monday, September 13, the National Nurses United (NNU) web page published a letter written by Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders about the strike. In the letter, he states he “wants to offer his strong voice of support, and offer [his] encouragement to the Minnesota Nurses Association and National Nurses United in your fight for proper staffing, nurse and patient safety, and health care access for yourselves and your families.”

The first thing that must be said is that Sanders' letter does absolutely nothing to strengthen the strike. Nurses do not need empty rhetoric hurriedly written down on a form letter—they need a strategy to mobilize the broadest support among workers and young people throughout the Twin Cities and across the country.

The real purpose of the letter is to provide a cover to the MNA and NNU executives who are opposed to any struggle that would disrupt their relations between the Democratic Party and corporate management. Sanders attributes the “fight for proper staffing, nurse and patient safety, and healthcare” to the MNA and NNU, not to rank-and-file nurses. However, before the strike began, the MNA had already capitulated to Allina's main demands that the nurses surrender their four union-sponsored health care plans.

The union officials have sought to cover up their abject capitulation by claiming that the surrender was a tactical maneuver to demonstrate Allina's stubbornness. When Allina rejected this offer, the MNA was forced to carry out their strike. The only thing the MNA executives want is to be in a position to “grant its consent” to cuts of five percent or more.

Conscious of the growing concern over the isolation of the strike, the MNA and NNU have solicited phony statements of solidarity from Sanders and other Democrats, such as US Congressman Keith Ellison. This goes hand-in-hand with pathetic appeals to the conscience of corporate board members who are executives at US Bank, Buffalo Wild Wings and General Mills. If you add up all of this “support,” it comes to the total of a big zero.

While NNU Executive Director RoseAnn DeMoro gushes over Sanders, saying, “nurses love Bernie all over the United States,” she deliberately conceals the treacherous role the Vermont Senator has played over the last year.

During his presidential bid, the self-described “democratic socialist” called for a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class.” On this basis Sanders won 13 million votes from workers and young people and defeated Hillary Clinton in Minnesota and

20 other states. He promptly endorsed Clinton, a warmonger and the favored candidate of the “billionaire class.”

Sanders is no socialist. He defends the capitalist system and Obama’s wars and promotes the lie that the Democratic Party can be turned into a party of working people. The Democrats, however, are no less a party of Wall Street and the Pentagon than the Republicans.

In the end, the purpose of the Sanders campaign was to corral social opposition and the growing interest in socialism, contain it within the Democratic Party and smother it. A whole host of pseudo-left organizations, including Socialist Alternative (which plays a prominent role in the MNA), have helped to perpetuate the political fraud by Sanders.

A common struggle against the attacks on health care and working conditions would mean that workers would come into direct conflict with the Democratic Party and the misnamed Affordable Care Act (ACA), or Obamacare. Sanders was a part of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, which is one of the two committees tasked with putting the ACA legislation together, and during the Democratic debates earlier this year Sanders even boasted that he “helped write” the ACA.

As so many have come to realize, ACA has been used to shift the cost of health care from employers and the government onto the backs of workers and force them to accept inferior coverage. It has also resulted in an increase of insured patients being admitted to hospitals, but in order to maintain profits, the hospital systems have not hired new nurses to compensate for the increase in patients.

Sanders and other Democratic Party hacks sold Obamacare as a progressive “reform” when they knew full well that the opposite was the case.

Nurses should ask themselves: is it any coincidence that the letter was published one day after the Socialist Equality Party’s presidential candidate, Jerry White, visited the picket lines at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis? Nurses gave a warm welcome to White and engaged in a serious discussion of the political issues raised by the strike. He explained the role of the MNA/NNU’s alliance with Sanders and the Democrats and urged nurses to take the conduct of the struggle in their own hands in order to fight for the mobilization of the entire working class against Allina and its corporate

and political backers.

Until this week, Sanders had said nothing about the nurses’ strike. On the day the walkout started, the Vermont Senator was shilling for Hillary Clinton alongside her at an AFL-CIO-sponsored Labor Day event in Lebanon, New Hampshire.

Sanders and the MNA/NNU are busy trying to provide a cover for each other, while together they try to contain the growing militancy of nurses and the whole working class. The last thing they want is a growing strike wave in the midst of Clinton’s election campaign.

If nurses are to defend their jobs and conditions, they must reject the subordination of their struggle to the Democrats and the capitalist system they defend. The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on nurses to expand their struggle, send out delegations of the rank and file into other sections of the working class, mobilize students on the university campus, and take the fight against Allina for what it really is: a struggle against the entire capitalist system.



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