

Negotiations resume as Minneapolis nurses' strike enters fourth week

Ron Jorgenson
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Allina Health and the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) announced a new round of negotiations beginning September 26, as the strike by 4,800 nurses at five Minneapolis-St. Paul metro-region hospitals enters its fourth week.

The recall of both sides by a federal mediator indicates that the company, the MNA bureaucracy and the Democratic Party are laying the groundwork for a final attempt to force through a sellout contract against the resistance of striking nurses.

Both Allina and the MNA maintain that the two sides were close to an agreement before talks broke off and an open-ended strike began on September 5. The MNA leadership has admitted they have “walked away” from safe staffing ratios and the defense of the traditional nurses’ health care plans that were the product of more than two decades of struggle.

What has stood in the way of concluding the strike on terms acceptable to the company is that an overwhelming majority of nurses are opposed to concessions and have voted down three contracts. Consequently, the MNA has been appealing to Allina management for a more graduated transition away from nurses’ traditional health care plans that will serve as a face-saving device for the union.

The company, the Democratic Party and the MNA leadership calculated that the isolation of Allina nurses from the broader mass of nurses and workers across the Twin Cities would break their resolve and compel them to accept concessions. Added to this is that on October 1, company contributions to health care for Allina nurses ends and the full burden of health care costs falls on the backs of striking nurses.

Allina spokesperson David Kanihan has indicated that the company may deepen its demands for concessions from nurses, declaring, “The longer the

strike goes on, it puts us in a financial position where we are less able to potentially give them everything that we offered before the strike started.”

Preceding the announcement of renewed talks, a group of “high ranking” Democratic politicians sent a letter to Allina CEO Penny Wheeler “urging Allina to reach a compromise with nurses” and held a press conference on the picket line issuing mild criticisms. This stunt has nothing to do with any genuine support for nurses. Certainly, some politicians calculate that it might garner votes for their party in the coming election, but the main purpose is to create the illusion that nurses can rely upon the Democratic Party to fight their battle for them as the new negotiations begin.

The MNA has also sought to divert the militancy of nurses into a corporate campaign that is targeting various CEOs who sit on Allina’s board of directors. As an example, the MNA sent out a delegation of nurses and other workers “to the office of David Kuplic, who sits on the Allina Board of Directors and serves as the CEO of Securian ... asking Mr. Kuplic to use his decision-making power on the board and push forward [a] fair contract for RNs, patients, and the community.”

On September 27, General Mills is holding a shareholder meeting where the MNA will seek to pressure John Church, a senior vice president of General Mills and chair of the Allina board of directors, to let him know “that he should support nurses!”

Allina nurses should stop to consider the bizarre nature of this campaign. These corporate sharks are from the same capitalist class as Allina CEO Penny Wheeler, who has remained unmoved by nurses from day one of contract negotiations. These CEOs will relish the defeat of the Allina nurses, not a “fair contract.” For them, contract concessions will result in

future profits through business with Allina.

Nurses should view all of the forces arrayed against them—the federal mediator, the MNA, the Democratic Party and the array of corporate CEOs and bankers—as their class enemies. And they must view with the greatest skepticism the current negotiations, which is a conspiracy to foist the company’s demands on nurses.

The real allies of nurses are their class brothers and sisters among health care workers and the millions of workers throughout the Twin Cities and across the United States. What is at stake in this struggle is not just working conditions and health care for Allina nurses. The decision of Allina and the banks to take on the nurses is part of a nationwide assault on health care for all workers that was initiated by the administration of President Barack Obama through the Affordable Care Act.

Nurses must break the isolation of their strike by electing rank-and-file committees that will turn towards the working class and mobilize them in a united struggle to fight for the right to health care for all.



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