

Minnesota nurses' union claims contract ratification amidst opposition

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Late Thursday night, the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) announced that a tentative contract agreement had been ratified by 4,800 nurses and Allina Health. The union declined to provide any details of the vote but said that a majority of nurses voted to accept the deal.

The contract presented and supported by the MNA is nearly identical to proposals previously rejected four times by nurses, who had been on strike for six weeks. The MNA announced early Tuesday morning that it had reached an agreement with Allina, immediately taking down picket lines and calling a shot-gun vote in an effort to ram the contract through.

The agreement between the MNA and Allina came after an intervention of Minnesota's Democratic Party governor, Mark Dayton, on behalf of the union-company alliance against the nurses. The MNA recommended a ratification of the contract that, like the previous offer, contained all of Allina's main demands, including the shifting of nurses from their current health care plan to costlier plans run by the company.

Dayton's intervention was a political decision by the Democratic Party to end the strike in the run-up to the November election, with the MNA tasked with selling it to nurses.

The MNA counted on the economic stress of nurses who have been strung out without strike pay and have had their health care cut off, coupled with a few cosmetic changes to the deal, to get the agreement passed. Included in the cosmetic changes to earlier contracts is a \$500 "health savings account," a miserable incentive to encourage nurses to shift to the costlier health care plans sooner. Even before the strike began, the MNA had already agreed to Allina's demands and was only looking for a way to sell concessions to a defiant membership. Throughout the

strike, the MNA, along with the AFL-CIO, worked to isolate the strike and wear down opposition.

Assuming that the vote tally is accurate, the passage of the contract is not the result of support for the deal. Rather, it is a vote of no confidence in the union to carry forward the struggle in defense of working conditions and health care.

Nurses will be returning to work on Saturday and Sunday. The passage of the contract paves the way for similar attacks on other nurses in the Minneapolis area.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with nurses voting at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis. One veteran nurse of almost 30 years denounced the sellout contract, "We deserve more... I should never have to apologize for asking for a livable wage. That includes benefits and health care."

The nurse denounced the "gains" in the contract surrounding workplace violence and safety, "In the contract, they make it sound as if we've won something on violence training. What they don't mention is that two hours of training is required by law in the state. What Allina wanted to do is give us the training through a computer."

The nurse continued, denouncing the wage increases in the contract as inadequate: "It's not even really about wages in the first place, but the two percent wage increase is still a pay cut. How can we accept two percent wage increases when inflation is around four percent and other costs of living are increasing? If we factor in the health care plans they're moving us onto, it's essentially a pay cut all around."

Another veteran nurse spoke about the support from the working class. "Many workers from different unions were supporting us, but they were not striking with us. If those workers who joined us on the picket lines actually had work stoppages as well, that would

put more pressure on Allina.”

The WSWS also spoke with a family member of a patient at Abbott Northwestern who agreed that the nurses need to mobilize workers from all sections against the capitalist system. She told reporters, “I used to think that the system is broken, but it works exactly the way they want it to.” She continued, “they want suppression; they want to keep everyone poor and subservient. I have three kids and work 60 hours a week just to make ends meet.”



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