

“UAW doesn’t care about us!”

Nurses outraged over UAW sellout of hospital strike in Toledo, Ohio

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Nurses in Toledo, Ohio, are outraged over the unilateral decision of the United Auto Workers (UAW) International union to shut down their six-week strike and impose a pro-company contract top UAW officials reached with Mercy Health St. Vincent Medical Center on Wednesday.

A statement by the UAW International announced that it had made an “unconditional offer to return to work on behalf of all former strikers.” While claiming the deal had “addressed many of the nurses’ major concerns, including quality of life issues,” the UAW did not reveal any details.

Nurses piled into a Local 2213 union meeting Wednesday night livid over the back-to-work order and plans by UAW International and Regional 2B officials to hold snap ratification meetings on Thursday and Friday without giving nurses sufficient time to study and discuss the deal.

Nearly 2,000 hospital workers who struck together on May 6 to fight understaffing, forced overtime, long on-call hours, substandard health care benefits and wages. The UAW isolated the walkout, including from the thousands of Fiat Chrysler workers at the nearby Jeep complex, and sought to starve workers into submission by doling out miserly \$250 weekly strike benefit payments while sitting on a \$750 million strike fund.

In the most treacherous blow, the UAW split the strikers by pushing through separate deals for support staff and technicians on June 2, instructing them to cross the picket lines of the 950 nurses, who had not reached a settlement and remained on strike.

Facing widespread opposition from rank-and-file nurses, UAW Region 2B issued a statement early Thursday morning announcing that it was rescheduling

the ratification meetings for Friday evening and Saturday afternoon and evening. The statement denounced local union officials for holding an informational meeting for striking nurses and allegedly spreading “misinformation” about the UAW-recommended deal.

“Due to misinformation being given by both Mercy Health and the Local 2213 President/Chairperson regarding the tentative agreement that has been reached, there will be NO ratification vote at UAW Local 12 on Thursday and Friday this week,” a Facebook post on the UAW Region 2B page said. “Without informing UAW Region 2B representatives, the Local 2213 Bargaining Committee held an informational meeting this evening (Wednesday). It is our belief that the membership has the right to be fully and accurately informed prior to voting on any contract.”

Autoworkers are familiar with the UAW’s supposed devotion to democracy. UAW executives routinely trample over the rights of workers: using threats of job losses to intimidate workers into voting for pro-company deals, releasing only self-serving “contract highlights” that cover up the real character of agreements and forcing workers to vote again and again on the same or slightly modified deals until they “get it right.” In 2015, after Fiat Chrysler workers rejected a UAW-backed deal by a 2-to-1 margin, the UAW mounted a campaign of lies, intimidation and outright vote fraud to push through pro-company deals at FCA, GM and Ford.

On the UAW Region 2B Facebook page, nurses responded with anger. Angel David Nichols posted: “I’m not buying this...the contract you are bringing us

will be the same contract we voted down.”

Meghan Christine posted: “There was no informational meeting last night, it was our daily 6:30p meeting we have been having since the beginning. She [Local 2213 President Sue Pratt] did not give out any information about said ‘agreement!’ But I’m sure your little moles probably told you otherwise! You make me sick! UAW doesn’t care about us!”

Mary A Bryant Richardson said: “What I don’t understand is how the strike could be cancelled and us forced back to work in less than 24 hrs without any explanation from anyone higher than Sue [Pratt]? This is unheard of, and a slap in the face to all of your members. This is not ok.”

Chelsea Kujawski posted: “We don’t even know what this contract says and we haven’t even had the chance to vote on it and they’re already taking us off the line and saying to return to work now!? What the heck!? We need answers!”

Katie Harrison posted: “You just want us to return to work with no vote and no explanation?!?” Denouncing the UAW officials, Daviona Camille posted: “Mistake number one putting power in your hands when you don’t have to suffer the consequence or work in the environment that you are making the decision for!!!”

In a video posted on the Region 2B Facebook page, regional director Rich Rankin (UAW 2018 salary \$170,900) said it was not true as management stated that “we are taking back the same contract,” claiming, “we added language.” He continued, “We brought the local leadership down to the region and they assured us that they were going to support this agreement and take back to membership for a vote.”

“Despite all the negativity,” Rankin said, referring to the opposition of rank-and-file nurses, “we are committed to fighting for our members’ interests.”

In an effort to intimidate nurses, Rankin said the UAW was sending nurses back to work because Mercy Health management had threatened to replace them all with strikebreakers if they were not back to work by Friday. “Given the current climate of the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board], getting striking nurses back to work was the best way to protect their jobs and keep from being permanently replaced.” While nurses have expressed concern about how many will be recalled and how many could face retribution, Rankin said it was up to management to “contact

individuals when they are required to work,” saying nothing about the fate of nurses who may face victimization for being militant or outspoken.

The abject capitulation by the UAW in the face of this strikebreaking threat is not just a matter of cowardice. The UAW wants to send a definite message to the 155,000 General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers whose contracts expire in mid-September: “If workers dare strike, we will isolate you, deny you anything but a pittance from the \$750 million strike fund, and leave you vulnerable to being replaced by strikebreakers.”

The betrayal of the Toledo hospital workers underscores that the biggest strikebreaker is the UAW itself, which does everything to divide and weaken workers and strengthen the hand of the corporate owners. As a reward, top union officials receive millions of dollars in bribes, seats on corporate boards and other substantial perks.

This is why the *World Socialist Web Site* and the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* have fought for Toledo hospital workers, teachers, autoworkers and other sections of the working class to build new organizations of struggle: factory and workplace committees, which are democratically controlled by the rank-and-file and committed to mobilize the strength of the working class in a fight for democratic and social rights.

Nurses should reject the sellout deal with the contempt it deserves and reach out to workers at other Mercy Health and ProMedica facilities, along with Jeep and other autoworkers, to fight for a general strike to beat back this attack.

In opposition to the UAW, which promoted various Democrats like Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown and Bernie Sanders as “friends of labor,” workers must launch a political counter-offensive against both corporate-controlled parties and fight for a socialist alternative to the capitalist system, including taking the profit out of medicine.



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