

Hundreds quit union as UAW pushes through sellout deal at Mercy St. Vincent Medical Center in Toledo, Ohio

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Nurses at the Mercy Health St. Vincent Medical Center reportedly ratified a new three-year contract in voting held Monday and Tuesday of this week. The vote followed a contract rejection earlier this month by some 900 members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) at the hospital in Toledo, Ohio.

According to reports 83.9 percent of nurses voted in favor, although there was no figure on the percentage taking part. The local bargaining committee had endorsed the deal.

Nurses carried out a six-week strike and hundreds have either resigned from the UAW in disgust or quit their jobs following the blatant betrayal of their struggle by the union.

Mercy Health St. Vincent nurses and support staff walked out on May 5 over pay, staffing and forced overtime that they said undermined patient care. The walkout won broad support from workers in the community, including autoworkers at the Fiat Chrysler Jeep complex, who welcomed the stand being taken by the health care workers.

During the strike nurses told the *Autoworker Newsletter* they had been forced to work up to 26 hours consecutively and said they had to sleep in their cars before they could drive home safely. Nurse to patient ratios had increased, doubling over the course of a year.

However, the UAW did nothing to mobilize broader support behind the workers, including rallying workers at other Mercy Health hospitals in the area or at facilities of the Pro Medica hospital network. Nurses and support staff were forced to subsist on a miserly \$250 weekly strike pay despite the UAW sitting on hundreds of millions of dollars in its bloated strike fund.

A turning point came when the UAW accepted a contract for support staff that excluded nurses. The union rushed through ratification June 2 without providing adequate time for discussion. Then, in a brazen act of treachery, the UAW ordered support staff to return to work, crossing the picket lines of striking nurses.

The nurses continued their strike, insisting that management offers did not address key issues, in particular the question of excessive on-call hours and forced overtime.

Unable to get the nurses to knuckle under to management demands, the UAW unilaterally declared the strike at an end and ordered an unconditional return to work on June 13.

The UAW then tried to force through ratification of a sellout contract, which nurses soundly rejected by a 57 percent margin.

After the unconditional surrender by the UAW, management began a campaign of harassment and intimidation to blackmail the recalcitrant nurses. Meanwhile, disgusted with the open collaboration of the UAW with management, hundreds resigned from the union and others sought jobs elsewhere.

In a statement issued ahead of the second ratification vote UAW Local 2213 President Susan Pratt, wrote of the new proposal, "Through these new changes we believe that Mercy has addressed some major concerns raised in the previous collective bargaining vote." Adding obliquely, "The democratic union process often has twists and turns, but once again it has given our nurses some important improvements toward a fair and equitable contract and patient care."

Nurses contacted by the WSWS *Autoworker*

Newsletter said the most recent proposal differed little from earlier deals. According to press reports, the earlier, rejected agreement contained a minimal 2 percent pay increase and cosmetic changes including a limit of 16 consecutive hours that a nurse must work during a 24-hour period, “A 15 percent reduction in on-call hours within an 18-month period for “certain areas” and “new language reinforcing staffing ratios and other staffing issues.”

A nurse contacted by the *Autoworker Newsletter* dismissed the supposed “improvements” in the new contract noting, “There are some caps on how much they can charge us for healthcare thru 2021, and there is now language that if a nurse has been working for 16 hours they must have 8 off before returning to work. I feel like Mercy will find a way to skirt that however. They find ways around language such as that, plus there are no real penalties if they do.”

With the contract for 155,000 autoworkers at Fiat Chrysler, Ford and General Motors set to expire in September, the UAW was determined to isolate the Mercy Health workers’ struggle to prevent it from setting a positive example. After decades of givebacks, autoworkers are in no mood for further concessions especially under conditions where the Detroit car companies are recording bumper profits.

Reflecting on the lessons of their struggle, a nurse told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “We were completely screwed from both ends. When they let the other 2 units cross our line to go back, I knew I was done. [I am] incredibly disgusted and disappointed in the union. What good is it to have an entity as corrupt as the one you are trying to fight? We need a union for the union!”

She added, “I would say the vast majority I have spoken to are fed up with the UAW. There has been a push to decertify.”

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* endorses the sentiments of nurses who have quit the union. The UAW is not a workers’ organization but a bribed tool of management that works shamelessly to cut costs and increase the rate of exploitation.

That being said, workers need organization. Every gain that workers achieved was won through bitter struggle against the employers and their two political parties, the Democrats and Republicans.

The questions facing nurses of understaffing, brutal

overwork and stagnating and declining wages are not local issues, but raise fundamental questions of importance for the whole working class. Employers everywhere are attempting to slash health care costs, gutting the quality of services and attempting to shift more of the costs onto the shoulders of workers. That was the thrust of President Barack Obama’s Affordable Care Act, aimed at undermining the principle of employer paid health insurance.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calls for the formation of rank-and-file workplace and factory committees to be the genuine voice of workers. These committees should be democratically chosen from among the most trusted workers and fight to establish their authority over work place conditions, including the exposure and rectification of abuses. They must insist on no secret negotiations and full disclosure of all contract terms. They must link the struggle of nurses nationwide and form connections with autoworkers, teachers and other sections of workers.

The *Autoworker Newsletter* has begun a series of call in meetings in preparation for the 2019 national auto contract negotiations. We encourage nurses to join the conversation and share the experiences of their struggle.



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