

# Allina health care workers begin limited two-day strike over safety conditions amidst pandemic

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A two-day strike of 220 medical tech workers and therapists at Allina Health in Minneapolis and Shakopee, Minnesota began Monday. The walkout took place one month after being overwhelmingly authorized by a vote of the workers. It took place despite being postponed by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Healthcare Minnesota union over threats of legal action by Allina Health.

Health care workers are seeking wage increases, better health care coverage and retirement plans, and increased paid time off as well as a general improvements in workplace safety. These concerns are especially pressing given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The SEIU had previously come to a temporary agreement with Allina that the company pay an initial one-time stipend to employees should they be exposed to the virus and need to quarantine. Workers are demanding that they be granted full wages and benefits during these periods to reduce the spread and risk to all workers and patients.

Workers' demands for safe working conditions and their efforts to save lives come into direct conflict with the profit interests of for-profit health care providers. From Allina's perspective as well as the banks that back it, the efforts to save lives by containing the spread of COVID-19 threatens their revenues. Allina Health, as well as every other Minnesota health care system, receives around half of its revenue from elective surgery procedures. Ending these procedures during the initial lockdown resulted in over \$150 million worth of losses, but this was softened by over \$170 million in government grants related to COVID-19 relief as well as loans from US banks.

The SEIU is the bargaining agent for many sections

of workers, from janitors to teachers and student employees. While these workers face similar conditions in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SEIU has refused to wage a united struggle over health and safety issues. It has only called strikes when necessary to vent the frustration of workers, while it seeks to corral opposition and channel it behind the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street and the corporations.

For these services, SEIU President Mary Kay Henry was named in TIME Magazine's list of the top 100 people of 2020. In honoring her, TIME writes about her advocating for token safety protections such as personal protective equipment and limited hazard pay, such as what was agreed between SEIU and Allina. Most notably, it lauds her for her efforts to trap workers in the Democratic Party ... "she's working to help get them to the polls."

The SEIU has specialized in calling isolated, one- or two-day strikes by small sections of workers. Their goal is to create the illusion that they can successfully pressure the management of large hospital chains to meet their demands. This isolation also serves to weaken the health care workers as the SEIU has separated Allina workers from other hospital chains such as Fairview.

Health care workers at Allina have allies both among medical staff at their hospital and across the nation. Last month, 4,000 University of Illinois medical center service, clerical, professional and technical workers in Chicago, Peoria and Rockford went on strike for higher pay and better working conditions during the deadly coronavirus pandemic. The SEIU and Illinois Nurses Association (INA) rammed through sellout contracts that did not meet any of the demands of the workers for

wage increases, staffing, or safety.

By contrast, teachers, parents and students have organized rank-and-file safety committees in New York, Texas, Florida and other states to oppose the homicidal drive to reopen schools and campuses across the country.

Allina workers must take control of their struggle out of the hands of the SEIU through the building of an independent rank-and-file safety committee and fight to link up their struggle with those of health care workers and other sections of workers confronting the COVID-19 pandemic.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Party encourage nurses, doctors, and all other healthcare workers to join in forming a network of rank-and-file committees to fight to establish decent and safe working conditions. This fight requires a struggle to establish health care as a social right and to end the subordination of medicine to the profit drive of the pharmaceutical companies and private insurers.



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