

Service employees union shuts down nursing home strike in Detroit suburb

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Late Tuesday night, less than two days after it began, the Service Employees International Union shut down a strike by workers at a Detroit area nursing home.

The union announced at 11 p.m. that a contract had been reached with the Four Seasons Rehabilitation and Nursing facility in the Detroit suburb of Westland. The union provided no details of the agreement, nor was the agreement presented to the striking workers for a vote. Workers were simply told a deal had been reached and that the strike was over.

While the details of the agreement have not been published as of this writing, the circumstances in which it was forced through shows it cannot be anything other than a sellout. The roughly 60 workers were demanding better protection from COVID-19, higher staffing levels, better health care coverage, and higher wages for certified nursing assistants (CNAs).

The shutdown of the Four Seasons strike follows similar betrayals carried out by the SEIU of strikes by Oakland-area hospital workers in California and service workers in the University of Illinois hospital system. In spite of the courage and determination of workers to fight against poverty wages and unsafe conditions, the SEIU, and the unions as a whole, have worked overtime to limit and isolate strikes and to keep workers on the job during the pandemic.

It is for this reason that workers must take matters into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees, representing the democratic will of the workers themselves, to organize a united struggle of the working class in opposition to union betrayals. Autoworkers and teachers across the country have already established a network of such committees.

From the beginning, the SEIU worked to isolate the Four Seasons workers. The facility is owned by Charles Dunn, who owns 11 other long-term care facilities in

the Detroit area. On Aug. 11, contracts expired for 18 area nursing homes, some owned by Dunn and some owned by Ciena Healthcare, which owns a total of 38 such facilities in Michigan. Ciena then obtained a temporary restraining order from the Oakland County Circuit Court to prevent a strike. Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer followed this with the demand that the SEIU and the facility owners continue talks for 30 days with no walkout, to which the union gave in.

On Oct. 9, the Detroit area nursing home workers voted to strike beginning Oct. 19. Immediately, the SEIU began negotiating with the nursing homes separately, reaching deals highly favorable to the management of the facilities, even forcing workers to settle for wages lower than \$15 per hour. The only facility without an agreement was Four Seasons, whose workers were left by the SEIU to fend for themselves.

Nursing homes in Michigan and around the world have been devastated by the coronavirus pandemic. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, as of Sept. 1, nursing homes accounted for 45 percent of deaths from COVID-19 in the US.

There have been more than 14,000 cases among nursing home residents and staff in Michigan alone, and more than 2,200 residents and 22 staff have died. At Four Seasons, five residents have died and 22 staff, or around a third, have tested positive.

Four Seasons staffers interviewed by the *World Socialist Web Site* described unsafe conditions, including having to reuse masks for weeks at a time, and chronic understaffing. With many positions left unfilled, some workers are putting in 80-hour work weeks.

Both the SEIU and the local Democratic Party sought to channel the strike into a get-out-the-vote campaign. Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib appeared on the picket

line on Monday and the union distributed strike placards urging people to vote. However, state and local Democrats have also carried out the reopening of workplaces and schools, essentially adopting the policy of “herd immunity.” Moreover, the Democrats have allowed Trump to prepare his coup plans, including the stacking of the Supreme Court to secure a Republican majority which would endorse his refusal to leave office, with only minimal opposition.



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