

Nurses union calls off strike at McLaren Macomb Hospital

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The union representing more than 500 nurses at McLaren Macomb Hospital in suburban Detroit called off preparations for strike action against the health care corporation early Saturday morning, saying that they had reached a tentative agreement.

Local 40 of the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) notified the nurses of the settlement through Facebook at 12:53 a.m.

The nurses had voted for strike action by 90 percent on June 29 and the union had sent management a 10-day strike notice on July 18 over inadequate staffing at the hospital over the past year and a half. Nurses have been forced to work at the hospital in the suburban Detroit community of Mount Clemens taking care of as many as six patients at a time.

Nurses also reported that the hospital had allowed their numbers to fall by more than 10 percent and did nothing to increase staffing, claiming that a nationwide nursing shortage was to blame for the situation.

The *Detroit Free Press* reported Saturday that OPEIU Local 40 President Jeff Morawski “declined to publicly share details of the contract” until a ratification vote is held on the agreement by the nurses in early August.

Morawski then told the *Free Press*, “It’s a good deal for everyone. We want to work together with the hospital and to make it a better place, and I think this agreement does that.”

In reality, the circumstances in which the union announced the deal can only mean that it is a rotten sellout. If the tentative agreement contained anything even remotely in the interests of the nurses and other hospital employees, the union would be promoting these details widely. Instead, the secretive manner in which information about the agreement is being presented as well as the way the vote is being organized shows that a betrayal by the union is underway.

The OPEIU Local 40 and its international union office had done nothing to prepare the struggle of the nurses against the health care corporation by mobilizing the strength of the entire workforce at Macomb Hospital, or the 20,000 people that work for the company at other hospitals and medical facilities throughout Michigan.

There is no reason to believe that McLaren Health and the management at Macomb Hospital has acceded to the demands by the nurses for staffing changes at the hospital without a strike and purely as a result of the negotiating tactics of the union. Rather, the precipitous ending of strike preparations and the announcement of an agreement is the means through which the OPEIU is engineering a betrayal of the nurse’s struggle against the hospital.

The Local 40 Facebook page has announced that an informational session on the tentative agreement will be held in a classroom at the hospital on August 2 from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and that voting on the agreement will be held remotely from 8:00 a.m. on August 2 to 8:00 a.m. on August 3. Therefore, nurses will have one hour to review the details and question the union about the agreement before voting begins.

Hospital management repeatedly attempted to smear the nurses over the past several months, claiming that they earn more money than average wage-workers in the area, knowing full-well that the primary issue has been staffing levels at the hospital. The management also claimed that the nurses were essentially greedy because an offer of a 15 percent wage increase and a \$2,000 signing bonus had been rejected. However, the wage increase offer was across four years and, at that rate, would not keep up with inflation and would in fact amount to a wage cut.

Meanwhile, the \$6 billion McLaren Health non-profit

health care corporation has billions in cash, was the recipient of more than \$146 million in federal government stimulus funding and has been compensating its top executive, Philip Incarnati, with as much as \$7.2 million in annual salary and other compensation in recent years.

Nurses at McLaren Macomb Hospital and the other health care corporations across Michigan and the US can only take forward the fight to improve working conditions and provide quality health care to the public by taking matters into their own hands independently of the companies and the unions.

Nurses must move now toward forming rank-and-file workplace committees that will place the needs of the working class above the profits of the employers and their bought-off surrogates in the official labor movement.



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