

Stanford nurses' anger grows as union attempts to force them back to work

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At 10 a.m. on Monday morning, the Committee for the Recognition of Nursing Achievement (CRONA) announced its tentative agreement covering 5,000 striking Stanford Health Care nurses had been ratified. According to CRONA, 83 percent of the nurses who voted approved the contract. The union did not release vote totals or the number of nurses who abstained from the snap vote, which CRONA conducted on Sunday, less than 24 hours after releasing the details of the deal.

This is an undemocratic effort to prematurely end the Stanford strike. The union has not produced a tally of the results and has not allowed nurses to count the ballots themselves, and many nurses tell the WSWs the results are highly questionable. Even if the figures were accurate, the contract is legally invalid as it was only agreed to under duress. After this weekend's events, there is growing opposition among nurses over the forced return to work as many believe the strike should be continued until nurses' demands are met.

Despite the union's claims, the vote was not an endorsement of its three-year deal, which abandons the demands for safe staffing and substantially improved wages that were at the center of the nurses' nearly weeklong strike. CRONA was only able to impose the pro-management deal by resorting to lies, intimidation and violations of the union's own bylaws. The union has instructed nurses at Stanford Health and Packard Children's Hospital to return to work at 6:45 a.m. Tuesday morning.

The struggle is far from over. None of the issues confronting nurses at Stanford and throughout the health care system—exhausting schedules, burnout, eroding living standards in the face of rampant inflation—have been resolved. As the impact of the sellout contract hits home, Stanford nurses will be

thrust into a struggle to overturn this illegitimate contract and renew the fight for their demands. It is not an option for nurses to wait three years for the next contract vote.

The opposition of nurses found its most conscious expression through the formation of the Stanford Nurses Rank-and-File Strike Committee, which opposed the contract and fought for the expansion of the strike throughout the state. Thousands of nurses read the statement issued by the committee Saturday, titled, "Vote 'NO' on the sellout contract at Stanford! Throw out the bargaining committee and elect a new one committed to fight for what nurses need!"

In discussions with the *World Socialist Web Site* Health Care Worker Newsletter, Stanford nurses denounced the contract and the anti-democratic measures used by CRONA to impose it.

"The tone the union was using to speak to us really changed at the Saturday meetings," one nurse said. "At first, it seemed like they were shutting down any people who had questions about the strike, now they are shutting down everyone who has questions about this agreement. All of this feels very rushed doing this all on a weekend. At least give us one business day to review 55 pages! CRONA kept saying 'Stanford is using these scare tactics to cut off health care' but now CRONA is telling us 'Sign this now before they cut off our health care.' In other words, the union is using Stanford's scare tactics against us, but we were all willing to strike indefinitely."

CRONA did not release the full agreement until Saturday afternoon after an outpouring of anger from nurses against the union's effort to bully them to vote on a contract without seeing the full details. Prior to that CRONA only released its own self-serving "highlights" of the deal.

During an informational meeting Saturday, workers said that rushing through the vote on Sunday less than 48 hours after reaching a deal was a violation of the union's own bylaws to provide workers with adequate time before a vote. CRONA President Colleen Borges arrogantly dismissed their criticisms, saying the union's requirement that a vote "occur within ten (10) calendar days after the Tentative Agreement is reached," was the maximum not the minimum time period before a vote.

The union also sought to blackmail the nurses by pointing to Stanford's plans to cut off medical benefits if they continued their walkout. Making it clear CRONA would do nothing to fight this, the nurses were pushed into a terrible position: vote "no" on a sellout contract and lose your health care for yourself and your family.

One Stanford nurse pointed to the tentative agreement's inadequate and unrealistic section on staffing. "How often did [CRONA leadership] cry on the news about safe staffing and then the points for safe staffing are just based on acuity [health status] which is what charge nurses already do day in and day out. Where is the staffing coming from for these fluctuations?"

Another nurse told the WSWS that nurses were having conversations in the Zoom chat during the informational meeting, voicing their frustration and calling for the release of the full tentative agreement. "We were bringing up that this was rushed in the chat. I wasn't necessarily in pure disagreement with the agreement but this has me really skeptical."

Another nurse said, "I think we need time to read our contract. We are working during a pandemic! We know what we survived and owe it to ourselves. We shouldn't be bullied into voting when we don't think it's fair. I think it's too rushed. It's very generic, the wording on staffing."

She continued, "Let's hire more people! We need more people on our back burners when we need them. But there's no plan. We need a plan! It's very rushed. I'm not comfortable deciding on something overnight. Friday I was screaming my heart out [on the picket line] and now I have to decide for tomorrow? I don't think so."

This nurse then made a strong call to her fellow nurses: "We need to read every word [of the tentative

agreement] because whatever we agree to we have to work with daily. It's not just us, it's our peers, and we have to all unite and be together because this is our chance.

"There are some nights when we don't want to be at work but we are there for each other. If we weren't, we might end up like those poor nurses who take their lives, who come to work when they are having a mental health breakdown. We need to speak up now. We have the momentum. We have the power. But if we don't have the leaders or the uppers on CRONA behind us, then we need to speak up."

There is a growing sentiment for a unified fight by all nurses and health care workers. In California alone, 8,000 Sutter nurses are working under an expired contract; 19,000 Kaiser workers have a contract coming up August 31; 2,000 workers at Cedars-Sinai will strike on May 9; 3,700 nurses at Tenet Healthcare are working under a contract that will expire on June 30.

The Stanford Nurses Rank-and-File Strike Committee will continue to provide leadership to defend nurses against the consequences of this contract and unite them with health care workers throughout the state, the US and internationally. Nurses and all workers are fed up with eroding living standards, unbearable working conditions and record high corporate profits and must unite to fight.

To contact our committee, phone or text: 216-245-7052. You can also email: Stanfordstrikingnurse@gmail.com



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