

Support nurses' strike in North Rhine-Westphalia! Build independent Action Committees!

Nursing Action Committee
10 June 2022

Dear brothers and sisters:

We have founded the Nursing Action Committee to take the fight for adequate working conditions and good nursing practice into our own hands, independent from the Verdi trade union, and to unite health workers internationally. Contact us on +491633378340 via WhatsApp or register here to participate.

The more than five-week nurses' strike at university hospitals in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) is of great significance. It is part of an unprecedented international mobilization of nurses. From the United States to Scotland, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, the Balkans, Greece, Turkey, Russia, Morocco, Uganda, New Zealand and Sri Lanka, nursing staff are currently taking industrial action. In France, a nationwide strike of hospital staff took place on Tuesday.

Everywhere, nurses face the same catastrophic situation: for two and a half years we have been working at our absolute limit because all the establishment parties decided to give priority to profits over health. They only ever implemented minimal measures at most to mitigate the pandemic, to ensure hospitals did not completely collapse.

But even before the pandemic, the restructuring of hospitals and growth of privatisation in public health provisions made our working conditions unbearable. This and the real wage cuts we have faced for years have made our fulfilling profession so unattractive that the staffing situation becomes worse every day.

The private and public hospital operators are also benefiting from this intolerable situation! Every understaffed shift, every mental and physical breakdown of colleagues due to overwork and every under-resourced patient helps their coffers grow!

To remedy this disaster, to make our jobs tolerable again and to provide adequate care to patients, a few cosmetic changes, such as those provided by the so-called "Relief Collective Bargaining Agreement" (TV-E), are not even close to enough. What is needed is an investment programme worth billions and the restructuring of hospitals in line with the needs of health workers and patients. The following demands are the least that must be achieved:

- For each understaffed shift, employees must be compensated at the rate of the lost worker's salary plus a 50 percent stress bonus! Those who do the work for two must also be paid for two! Only in such a way can the perfidious system be terminated, in which the health enterprises enrich themselves through exploiting understaffing at the expense of our health!
- Immediate doubling of staff! Each of us knows that adequate care is only possible with a massive increase and a reversal of all staff cuts!
- This is only possible if nurses are finally paid adequately. With inflation running at 20 to 50 percent for food, the current pay freeze means an unacceptable loss of real wages. To compensate for this and the previous cuts in real wages, pay must be increased by at least 30 percent and adjusted to inflation on a sliding scale!
- €100 billion for health instead of for armaments! For years, hospitals have been cut to the bone with the argument that there is no money. Now, horrendous resources are being used to rearm Germany into Europe's largest military power. Instead, the money must be invested in the fight against the pandemic and a massive expansion of the health care system!

When we fight for these demands, we are not only

confronted with the government and corporations, but also with the trade unions. Verdi has helped organize our vile working conditions for decades. One deterioration followed the next. Most recently, Verdi forced a substantial real wage cut on us with the pay freeze and the 2.8 percent wage “increase” starting in December. That is the thanks we receive for the enormous sacrifices we have made during the pandemic.

Now Verdi, which agreed to every deterioration in our pay and conditions, is beating the drum for the TV-E “Relief Contract.” But this has just as little to do with our interests; this contract will not end understaffing but enforce it. We can see this in Berlin, where the TV-E introduced a points system in which an employee collects one point for each understaffed shift. For five points, he or she theoretically gets a day off—but then cannot then take it because there simply is not enough staff. The points thus only serve to legitimize the completely unacceptable system of understaffing. The situation of our nursing colleagues, on the other hand, has not improved one jot.

We can only win our fight for real improvements by taking away Verdi’s negotiating mandate and organizing independently in rank-and-file action committees that unite the struggles across sectors and national borders. In the US, nurses have already formed Health Care Workers Rank-and-File Committees. The struggle in Germany must be waged together with them and with health care workers around the world.

In NRW itself, numerous strikes and protests are currently taking place for higher wages and against planned mass layoffs. This is precisely why the strike at the university hospitals is also enjoying huge support. Workers understand that it concerns their own interests when the health sector is being destroyed and workers are being maltreated.

This must be made the starting point of a broad mobilization for adequate health care and workers’ rights, against the attempts of the unions to isolate and suppress labour struggles. In doing so, we are confronted with very fundamental issues. The government has made it absolutely clear that it intends to place profits before health and sacrifice social resources in the service of rearmament, rather than improve education and health.

But we are stronger than governments, corporations

and unions when we unite internationally and fight together. Labour struggles have been victorious in the past and they can be again now if we organize independently. So, contact us today, for example, by WhatsApp at: +491633378340. Register to set up action committees at your hospital and get involved in building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact