

Long Beach Medical Center nurses must reject the TA! Unite with nurses' struggles across the West Coast!

World Socialist Web Site Health Care Workers Newsletter
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Long Beach Medical Center (LBMC) nurses must reject the tentative agreement being brought by the California Nurses Association by the widest possible margin. The CNA has called off a planned picket for Wednesday and is rushing for a vote on the deal by the end of the week, without allowing nurses adequate time to study the agreement.

LBMC nurses are ready to take a stand for all health care workers who want to fight the abuse by giant hospital chains whose priority is profit, not saving lives. But they are being held back by the union bureaucracy, which has sold out one struggle after another and imposed substandard contracts which do nothing to address understaffing and keep wage increases well below inflation. This includes tens of thousands of workers at Kaiser Permanente across the West Coast late last year, 1,600 nurses at Providence St. Vincent in Oregon and 2,000 nurses at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

A rejection, however, is only the starting point. Nurses must move now to develop a rank-and-file committee at Long Beach Medical Center to challenge the bureaucratic strangling of their struggle. Appeals must be sent out for a broader struggle uniting nurses across the West Coast and around the country.

Voting will take place Thursday and Friday, but nurses will not be given access to the full TA until the day of the vote. Nurses also report that they have signed up for the union's email newsletter multiple times over several months and have never received email updates, leading them to question if they will ever receive the link to vote. This is a classic tactic by the unions to pull the wool over the eyes of members to force through a sellout.

The cherrypicked highlights of the deal which nurses have been provided claim "significantly improved wages" and "improvements" to shift differentials and on-call pay. However, beyond these vague assertions, it contains no additional information, not even basic information like percentages. If these wage increases were truly "significant," they would be listed proudly on the flier.

According to information provided to the *World Socialist Web Site* by an LBMC nurse, wage increases will be roughly 4-5 percent for 2023 and 2024 under the new deal, barely half the level of current inflation. In other words, instead of "significantly improved wages" the deal would enforce significant cuts to real wages.

Not included in these highlights is any discussion of health care benefits, an issue that will directly affect nurses and their families for the next three years.

Changes to contract "language" around floating, used in hospitals to move staff to cover shortages, are vague and superficial and will do nothing to address the work overload that nurses are facing.

In the 2019 contract, night shift nurses were allotted an additional 40 hours of PTO (Personal Time Off) to account for sleep issues, health problems and frequent schedule conflicts that arise for nurses who work night shift. In the highlights, CNA celebrates that Night PTO will "continue thru June 2024." This is like celebrating an eviction notice because the eviction will not actually take place for another year.

In a similar vein, the highlights note that the "blood assurance program" will end one year into the contract. The blood assurance program allows employees to donate blood in exchange for additional PTO hours.

Each blood donation awards the employee four hours of additional PTO, with a maximum of 16 hours a year. Of course, nurses should not be required to donate four pints of blood to get additional PTO hours, but the ending of the program is not being offset with additional guaranteed PTO.

Most importantly of all, there is no language in the highlights pertaining to staffing. This is the most important issue facing nurses not only at LBMC, but across the country as the pandemic has left hospitals chronically overburdened.

The mass opposition of nurses found expression in the comments section on the CNA Long Beach Memorial FB page, where nurses have voiced their opposition to both the rushing of the vote and the highlights of tentative agreement. Nurses have also been quick to voice their frustration with the undemocratic methods of the CNA. “Why aren’t these planned for Tuesday and Weds also?” one nurse asked. “Are you emailing the TAs and contract to us before so we are ready with questions? I’d think you would want to educate and inform us fully before we vote.”

Another said: “What’s holding the union from showing the TA to us?... A lot of us don’t trust the union and showing us the TA might help with this issue. We’re asked to trust the negotiation team but how could we if we are being kept in the dark?”

The union has arrogantly dismissed these and other comments by calling them “misinformed” and hypocritically telling them to “read the whole contract,” which they are not providing, before making a decision.

No doubt CNA will tell nurses that the deal on the table is the best that they can get. They will also attempt to scare nurses by claiming that if they reject the deal, the next one will be even worse.

What nurses face, however, is not a “normal” contract fight but a fight to save the health care system from collapse. Two and a half years of endless pandemic surges have driven hospitals around the country to the brink. Health care services have been starved of funding while hospital executives and the health care companies as a whole have reaped massive profits. Nurses and other medical professionals are being driven out of the profession in droves by constant, unbearable levels of overwork, making the situation even more dangerous for both staff and

patients.

It is time for nurses to take matters into their own hands. Despite what the unions say, nurses are not isolated. Far from it. Indeed, the day before voting is scheduled to begin at Long Beach Medical, 4,500 CNA nurses at three other California hospitals will begin a two-day strike at Seton Medical Center, Kaiser Permanente LA Medical Center and Palomar Health in San Diego.

Moreover, beyond the health care industry, the largest wave of strikes and working class protests in generations is underway, changing the balance of forces in favor of nurses and all those committed to public health oriented towards human need and not profit.

But to actualize this power, nurses need organizations that they control. This means the formation of a rank-and-file committee at Long Beach Medical Center, consisting of and controlled by nurses themselves and not the bureaucracy. By affiliating with the Health Care Workers Rank-and-File Steering Committee, consisting of nurses and health care workers across the United States, nurses at Long Beach can appeal to their allies in hospitals throughout the country and to the working class as a whole for a united struggle.

If you agree with this program, take up the fight! Contact us for more information on how to found a committee by filling out the form below:



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