“I think they’re setting us up to get screwed”: Unions move to shut down multiple health care struggles in California

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The Steering Committee of Rank-and-File Nurses will be meeting this Sunday, June 26, at 11:00 a.m. Pacific/2:00 p.m. Eastern. We invite all California nurses and health care workers everywhere to register and join this important meeting.

Yesterday, a number of one-day strikes took place at several health care facilities in California, including Kaiser Los Angeles Medical Center, AHMC Seton Medical Center in Daly City and Shasta Regional Medical Center in Redding.

A strike at Long Beach Medical Center (LBMC) was called off on Wednesday, along with another strike at Palomar Hospital in the North County of San Diego. In both cases, the California Nurses Association (CNA) announced that agreements had been reached between the union and hospital management, which the union is attempting to ram through as quickly as possible.

The agreements came only hours before the one-day strikes were set to begin. Earlier this month, nurses and other health care staff at Palomar Health voted by 96 percent to authorize a strike over staff shortages, unsustainable patient-to-nurse ratios, and the need for an increase in wages due to the sharp rise in inflation.

Palomar nurses who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* were strongly in support of a strike, despite knowing that they would not be receiving strike pay.

Prior to the calling off of the strike, one nurse from Palomar Health told the WSWS that the hospital was preparing to bring in strike-breakers, paying each $200-$300 per hour. “Instead of paying them, why doesn’t the hospital invest that money in their nurses?”

Nurses are also fighting against the medical institutions’ attempt to contract out certain jobs in an effort to cut costs.

The CNA, however, did everything it could to avoid this strike, posting a press release late Wednesday night announcing that the strike had been “averted.”

Nurses and other health care staff at Palomar Health had been working without a contract since March, and many workers have left due to burnout or in search of better wages. Negotiations have been ongoing for the past 14 months.

The CNA is attempting to shut down the struggle before it even begins.

In April, Palomar Health was proclaimed by *Newsweek* to be one of the “World’s Best Hospitals.” A few days later, a patient under 24-hour supervision jumped from a sixth-floor balcony. With a skeleton crew and nurses battling against burnout, it is not surprising such a tragedy occurred.

This story mirrors the horrific event that occurred in May at Orlando Regional Medical Center, when patient Richard St. Onge tragically took his own life by jumping from his hospital window on the eighth floor, after his supervision personnel was removed.

One nurse who spoke to the WSWS at Long Beach Medical Center said, “We read you guys (WSWS). Glad you’re here. As far as the TA [Tentative Agreement] goes, the CNA hasn’t told us anything. I think they’re setting us up to get screwed.”

At Seton Medical Center in Daly City, 300 nurses went on a two-day strike on June 22 and 23. Seton Medical Center is a 430-bed hospital. It was purchased in 2019 by the for-profit health care conglomerate AHMC after the previous owner, Verity Health Systems, declared bankruptcy.

Seton nurses have been in contract negotiations since December 2021, and nurses have told local news that

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they are working without basic supplies such as fresh linens, bath wipes, diapers, and gloves. Staffing is also inadequate, with nurses reporting that they are out of the legally mandated state ratios on a daily basis. These intolerable conditions have led to roughly 80 nurses leaving the hospital within the last two years, according to the CNA.

An experienced nurse who works in the interventional radiology department told the WSWS, “We are always short on staff. Everybody is leaving. We are short, we don’t get breaks anymore, so how are we going to attract new nurses? It’s a bad cycle.”

She explained how the education for new nurses at the hospital is very poor. “I don’t think anyone is oriented properly. It’s a big problem. Lots of new graduate nurses don’t know what labs they are supposed to draw or what protocols to follow. You can hear them asking everyone around them. It’s not their fault, they just weren’t trained well.”

The elevator to the MRI machine, another nurse explained, is often broken for days to weeks at a time. “Unless the patient is ambulatory or can ride in a wheelchair and doesn’t need to be sedated due to claustrophobia, then they don’t get an MRI or it gets very delayed.”

“Our CT machine is also broken all the time,” another nurse said. “When it’s broken we have to take our patients outside to use the portable one. It’s cold out or rainy, doesn’t matter we have to transport them all the way outside. It’s not safe.”

A few nurses discussed the issue of poor staffing. A newer nurse who works on a medical surgical unit stated, “Patient needs should always come first, but this hospital was purchased in a deficit so the new owners are still doing everything they can to cut costs. They laid off a bunch of ancillary staff, lab workers, admitting workers, EVs. Sometimes there are no transporters, and we have to take our patients to their procedures or tests or go pick them up. Health care should not be about profit.”

Yesterday, the CNA bargaining team at Long Beach Medical Center released the tentative agreements and are holding three two-hour Zoom sessions. Nurses have been told by the union that the TAs will only be available to review between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Thursday and Friday and will “disappear” if they do not download them before they vote.

Many nurses are complaining how challenging the voting process is, and others still have not received a link. After an initial review of the TA, nurses are saying it is much worse than they thought.

An LBMC nurse who complained that they had not received a flyer regarding the TA received the following response from a bargaining team member: “Many of our fliers [sic] have been posted on the CNA Long Beach Nurses-In-Action site. Do your own homework, we can’t spoon feed 2,2000 nurses.”

Nurses and other health care workers want to fight back, recognizing that they cannot safely or effectively treat or care for patients under the for-profit system of the hospitals. All health care workers must fight to build their own rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions that are doing everything they can to shut down a growing rank-and-file movement.

The WSWS encourages all those who want to fight back to contact us at wsws.org/nurses and sign up to help build a rank-and-file committee in your facility.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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