

How Left Voice and the DSA assist the union bureaucrats in selling out the Michigan Medicine nurses' contract fight

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Are you a nurse or health care worker at Michigan Medicine? Contact the WSWS Health Care Workers Newsletter using the form at the end of this article to discuss building a rank-and-file committee.

Recent events in the months-long contract struggle of 6,200 nurses at Michigan Medicine in Ann Arbor, Michigan have exposed groups such as *Left Voice* (LV) and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) as supporters of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. Far from representing the struggle for socialism, these groups are part of the corrupt union apparatus and the capitalist political establishment.

Both LV and the DSA were present at the rally and informational picket at Michigan Medicine on Saturday, July 16, to which hundreds of nurses and their supporters turned out. The purpose of the participation of these organizations was to give the union—the Michigan Nurses Association (MNA) and its locally affiliated University of Michigan Professional Nurse Council (UMPNC)—a “left” cover and assist in the ongoing isolation and betrayal of the nurses’ struggle.

Michigan Medicine nurses are determined to find a way to take forward their struggle. It is critical, however, that they recognize they face a fight on two fronts: against both the hospital management and the MNA-UMPNC.

Since the beginning of contract negotiations, the hospital administration has not budged from its intention to maintain mandatory overtime, excessive on-call hours and the staffing shortage that underlies the intolerable working environment at Michigan Medicine.

But when the previous contract expired on June 30, the MNA-UMPNC leadership took no action. It failed even to demand an extension of the old contract pending rank-and-file ratification of a new one.

The union did not hold a strike vote when hospital management provocatively denied nurses their step pay increases due on July 1. Instead, the union leadership scheduled “informational meetings” and told the nurses that the bargaining team was continuing to negotiate (behind closed doors and out of view of the rank-and-file).

Attempting to contain the growing anger and determination of

the nurses, the MNA-UMPNC organized the rally and informational picket on July 16 to let off steam. The union leaders paraded their friends in the Democratic Party such as Representative Debbie Dingell and union bureaucrats like Michigan AFL-CIO President Ron Bieber onto the platform to make empty promises such as “We’ve got your back,” and “You are going to win.”

In other words, to do nothing concrete to mobilize the powerful working class of Michigan behind the nurses.

Diverting the struggle of nurses toward support for the Democratic Party has been the union’s strategy all along. The MNA-UMPNC organized interventions at meetings in May and June of the University of Michigan Board of Regents—six out of eight of whose members are Democrats—to spread the false hope that these wealthy representatives of the auto companies, the insurance monopolies and the banks would grant a “fair contract.”

Now the MNA-UMPNC has announced plans for a third such intervention at the July 26 regents’ meeting to make more fruitless appeals to the likes of pizza chain billionaire Denise Ilitch and multimillionaire personal injury lawyer Mark Bernstein.

These representatives of the Michigan business and political elite will not lift a finger to address the concerns of Michigan Medicine nurses. Far from it. These are the very people who are responsible for hospital management’s intensification of inhuman and unsafe work schedules throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

On July 13, *Left Voice* posted an article hailing the leadership of the MNA-UMPNC. Having ignored the nurses’ struggle for months, LV sprang into action to back the union bureaucracy on the eve of the July 16 rally.

In its article, LV fully endorsed the “public pressure campaign” of the MNA-UMPNC and saluted the useless appeals to the University of Michigan Board of Regents.

Writing, “Michigan nurses are not afraid to strike,” the article concealed the fact that it is the MNA-UMPNC that has blocked a strike from taking place. Moreover, LV presented strike action by Michigan Medicine nurses not as a means of uniting

with other sections of the working class to win definite demands, but as a means of pressuring the university “to hear their voice.”

LV is silent on the unions’ treacherous alliance with the Democratic Party, which controls the Michigan government and enforces the anti-strike laws that strip nurses of their democratic right to fight for decent conditions.

Nurses know that striking is a serious step. But nothing has ever been won without a struggle, and nurses are in a powerful position to win their demands if they build rank-and-file committees throughout the Michigan Medicine system to unite with doctors and support staff and appeal to the broader working class. The *WSWS Health Care Workers Newsletter* will assist nurses in building these committees, which have already been established in facilities across the country and internationally.

The publishers of LV claim to be anti-capitalist, socialist and even Trotskyist. They are none of these things.

No genuinely socialist or Trotskyist organization supports capitalist parties such as the Democratic Party. Socialists fight for the political independence of the working class from all big business parties and politicians, and oppose bureaucratic, pro-corporate “unions” that subordinate workers to these parties. They fight for workers’ democratic control through the formation of rank-and-file committees to link up the struggles of workers and mobilize their social power, not divide workers and isolate their fight for decent contracts, wages and working conditions.

Under Biden and a Democratic-controlled House and Senate, and with the assistance of the official unions, all measures to contain the spread of COVID have been lifted and workers have been forced to toil in unsafe work places in order to keep the flow of profits going. The result, as predicted by principled scientists and the *World Socialist Web Site*, is hundreds of thousands more deaths from newly evolved, more contagious and virulent variants such as BA.5.

The fight for decent working conditions, a living wage and patient safety is a political fight against both parties of big business.

Alongside of LV, supporters and members of the DSA at the University of Michigan also defended the MNA-UMPNC leadership at the rally and informational picket. The DSA is a faction of the Democratic Party, and has been since its founding in 1982.

In a tweet on the afternoon of July 16, the University of Michigan Young Democratic Socialists (UMYDSA) hailed the Huron Valley and Michigan AFL-CIO bureaucrats at the rally as “comrades.”

A visit to the websites of the Huron Valley and Michigan AFL-CIO shows that these organizations are opposed to any kind of mass struggle by workers for improved wages, benefits and working conditions. Neither site has any coverage of the Michigan Medicine nurses’ contract struggle.

The top items on the Huron Valley AFL-CIO website’s section labeled “Take Action” are support for Biden’s dead-on-arrival “Build Back Better” initiative and a pro-war campaign to raise money for Ukrainian labor organizations.

The Michigan AFL-CIO website carries a front page photograph of Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer with the headline “Labor Builds Michigan” and links to a page with endorsements for the reelection campaigns of Whitmer for governor, Dana Nessel for attorney general and Jocelyn Benson for secretary of state. Not a single struggle by Michigan workers is reported on the site.

At the July 16 event, representatives of the *WSWS Health Care Workers Newsletter* distributed leaflets with the headline: “Michigan Medicine nurses must demand a strike vote now!” and warned the nurses that the union was blocking any real fight for their demands. The leaflet stated that the MNA-UMPNC policy of keeping nurses on the job “only ties the nurses’ hands and favors management, which feels emboldened.”

The statement called on nurses to form a rank-and-file committee to take the conduct of the struggle against Michigan Medicine out of the hands of the union bureaucracy, end the fruitless appeals to the Democrats and turn to other health care workers and broader sections of the working class that are coming into struggle over the same basic issues.

The union bureaucrats are terrified of these policies. Operatives of the MNA-UMPNC hounded WSWS reporters as they attempted to speak with nurses about their struggle and used anti-communist epithets in an effort to intimidate nurses and their supporters from accepting copies of the leaflet. Many nurses and supporters refused to be bullied and took copies of the *WSWS Health Care Workers Newsletter* statement.

Such anti-democratic, thuggish methods are meant to prevent nurses from discussing a genuine militant and socialist alternative to the bankrupt policies of the union bureaucrats. The union tops have no such concerns about their pseudo-left friends and allies in *Left Voice* and the DSA.



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