

15,000 nurses in Minnesota authorize strike against major hospital systems: “Something has to change”

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Are you a nurse? Make your voice heard: Fill out the form below and tell us what conditions are like at your facility, and what you think nurses should be fighting for.

On Monday, 15,000 nurses across Minnesota in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) and Twin Ports cities voted overwhelmingly to strike.

The strike vote was held amid a surge of militancy among health care workers in Minnesota and nationwide. From Minnesota, to Michigan, to California and elsewhere, nurses are determined to fight for better conditions for their patients, wages that outpace decades of stagnation and beat skyrocketing inflation, an end to brutal work schedules and dangerous understaffing, and for protections against the ongoing pandemic.

The nurses who voted to strike work across 15 hospitals and seven health systems, including Allina, Fairview Health, HealthPartners, Children’s Minnesota, and North Memorial Health. Nurses working in St. Luke’s and Essentia Health in Moose Lake also voted to authorize a strike Tuesday, joining the Twin Cities and Duluth nurses.

Nurses are seeking to fight back against the worsening conditions they and their patients face. But a warning must be made: the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) will not respond to the strike vote by leading a real struggle, but rather by accelerating their efforts to reach a settlement which resolves none of the problems nurses face.

Despite the obvious intransigence of hospital management, the MNA has kept nurses on the job for more than two months without a contract in the Twin Cities, more than a month in Duluth, and in the case of

Moose Lake, more than two years.

The MNA’s unwillingness to wage a struggle on behalf of nurses has already been repeatedly demonstrated by the previous contracts they’ve reached, which surrendered nurses’ demands to meet the hospital systems’ needs, and have culminated in the miserable conditions nurses now confront. At the same time, the MNA, like its counterparts elsewhere, has relentlessly promoted and is intimately tied to the Democratic Party, one of the two big business parties responsible for the decades-long attacks on health care on behalf of corporate and financial interests.

To secure their needs and prevent another betrayal, nurses must organize and take the initiative through the formation of rank-and-file committees. Nurses should demand a strike deadline be set immediately, that closed-door negotiations be ended and all talks livestreamed, and that no separate agreements be reached which split their collective strength.

Before the strike vote was held for the nurses on Monday, MNA President Mary Turner, in a press conference last Thursday, signaled that the union may seek to confine a walkout to one day, saying, “Whatever we vote on, however many days, even if it’s just one day, we’re all going to have in our hearts that we feel like we’re abandoning our patients.” Such statements, moreover, play entirely into the hands of the corporate media and the attempts to paint nurses as responsible for the crisis in health care, as opposed to its real source: the disastrous subordination of health care to the profit system.

Following the strike vote, the MNA held another press conference Tuesday morning, in which Turner said that the union was “not calling for a strike

immediately.” Repeating the MNA’s fruitless appeals to the consciences of the multimillionaire hospital executives, she said, “The future of health care depends on the decisions that hospital executives will make in the near future,” and that “what happens next is up to the CEOs.”

Growing sections of health care workers are speaking out over their unbearable workloads and the demands of management. A nurse educator who wrote to the *World Socialist Web Site* said that she was the sole educator for a staff of several hundred nurses. She was no longer able to manage keeping nurses up-to-date with necessary competencies on her own. “I too am understaffed and the lack of competency verification is dangerous to patients and our hospital’s accreditation. I work 60+ hours a week and am burned out.” She continued, “Something has to change.”

Nurses and health care workers across the country are battling for better conditions. Two thousand Kaiser mental health care workers in Northern California are in the fourth day of their strike for better conditions. The National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW) is keeping this struggle separate from their 14,000 other health care members, and reached a separate agreement for Kaiser mental health workers in Southern California earlier this year.

In Michigan, more than 6,000 nurses at Michigan Medicine have been kept on the job without a contract since the end of June by the Michigan Nurses Association and the University of Michigan Professional Nurse Council (UMPNC). Instead of calling a walkout, the unions are attempting to stall while keeping nurses tied up with drawn-out lawsuits.

Instead of uniting Minnesota nurses with the struggles of nurses in California and Michigan, the MNA initiated an advertising campaign directed at the executives of the major hospital systems while promoting the Democratic Party. In recent days, the MNA has trumpeted a raft of endorsements of Democratic Party politicians. The promotion of Democratic politicians was also a major component of the several stunts pulled by the MNA, including the “informational pickets” and the vote of “no confidence” in the CEOs of the major hospital systems.

This is why it is critical that nurses take urgent action to break free from the straitjacket imposed by the unions, which are serving as obstacles to the unity of

nurses and the fight to secure their demands, and form independent rank-and-file committees led by the most militant nurses. Nurses can win their demands, and ultimately fight for the elimination of diseases like COVID and monkeypox, which are continuing to spread due to the “let it rip” policy of the Biden administration.

The unions have worked in the closest collaboration with the Democratic Party to curtail workers’ struggles for decades, leading to stagnating wages and deterioration of workers’ conditions. This process has reached a new stage with the Biden White House, which has declared itself the most “pro-union administration” in history, by which it means that it sees the union bureaucracies as critical tools in imposing labor “discipline” and the needs of US imperialism.

Building new organizations which are democratically controlled by nurses and independent of all the big business parties is critical to winning their demands. Such organizations must take up the demand for the socialist transformation of health care, as part of a system which is dedicated to workers’ needs, not private profit.



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