

Michigan Medicine recruiting strikebreakers in anticipation of nurses' strike

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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. What are the main issues you face at your workplace? What do you think needs to be done? All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Michigan Medicine, the health care system of the University of Michigan, is using a strikebreaking company to recruit “replacement nurses” and deploy them as scabs in the event of the union calling an unfair labor practices strike.

The contract covering 6,200 nurses at the Ann Arbor-based health care system expired on July 1 and nurses have been working without a contract ever since. The union—Michigan Nurses Association/University of Michigan Professional Nurse Council (MNA-UMPNC)—refused to hold a strike authorization vote for weeks on the grounds that public employee strikes are banned by Michigan law.

However, facing an intransigent management that refuses to even recognize the right of nurses to bargain for lower patient-to-nurse ratios, and growing anger among nurses over dangerous and exhausting understaffing and mandatory overtime, the union announced a series of “work stoppage” authorization votes last week after filing an unfair labor practices claim.

The votes are scheduled to be held at a series of special membership meetings between August 27 and September 2.

The nurses are in a powerful position to mobilize the active support of the entire Michigan Medical staff, professors, students and university employees, as well as autoworkers, teachers, logistics workers and other sections of the working class across the state and nationally behind a strike to reverse years of job-

cutting, speedup and reductions in real wages.

However, this requires that they take matters into their own hands and establish a Michigan Medicine rank-and-file workers’ strike committee to lead the fight for what nurses need, not what management and the union bureaucrats say is “affordable.”

The university is preparing for all out war against the nurses and all Michigan Medicine workers. This is the significance of their recruitment of strikebreakers.

But the nurses’ union bureaucracy is doing the opposite. This is shown by the union leadership’s failure to even inform the rank-and-file of the strikebreaking threat.

The *World Socialist Web Site* learned of the recruitment of strikebreakers from a Michigan Medicine nurse and WSWs reader. She referenced a post on a Facebook page used by nurses that included an appeal from an outfit called “Medical Solutions” for nurses to sign up as strikebreakers. It states:

Medical Solutions is recruiting for a possible September strike in Michigan. All nursing specialties are welcome. We will assist and pay for your license up front, no reimbursements necessary. Please complete the link and call ASAP to reserve a spot.

The link takes you to a contract form for nurses applying to replace striking workers. Here is the opening paragraph of the contract:

This agreement (“Agreement”) confirms that

(“Employee”) has agreed to provide temporary healthcare staffing through Medical Solutions Strike Staffing (“MSSS”) at its client location (“Client”) in the state of Michigan for a work stoppage job action (“Job Action”).

The MSSS contract lists pay rates well above those of current Michigan Medicine nurses: \$160 per hour for nurses in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit and \$140 per hour for nurses in the Neonatal, Cardiovascular and Burn Intensive Care Units. The lowest pay posted is \$105 for “All other RN specialties.”

According to Glassdoor.com, the median pay for a registered nurse at Michigan Medicine is \$43 per hour. Indeed.com lists the average RN salary at Michigan Medicine as \$62,623. This converts to just over \$30 per hour. If these numbers are anywhere near nurses’ actual salaries, Michigan Medicine and the university Board of Regents are offering two to three times the average RN pay to prospective scabs.

Further inducements include free airfare or other travel arrangements to Michigan, free hotel/motel accommodations during the term of employment, and free daily transportation to and from the hospital.

This strikebreaking operation is being prepared with the knowledge and support of the same Democratic Party officials—Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Representative Debbie Dingell, etc.—for whom the MNA-UMPNC and the Michigan AFL-CIO are campaigning for reelection.

The same university Board of Regents, stacked with Democrats, to whom the union told nurses to appeal for relief from intolerable work schedules and understaffing, will oversee the mobilization of scabs.

One searches in vain on the Michigan AFL-CIO website for a mention of the Michigan Medicine nurses’ contract struggle and possible strike. Yet the same site is dominated by photos of Whitmer campaigning for workers’ votes.

The WSWs *Health Care Workers Newsletter* urges nurses to vote overwhelmingly to strike. But it must be a strike to win, not to be isolated and sold out by the union bureaucracy!

This means preparing now for an all-out fight against not just the university, but also against the big business politicians of both parties and the corporate interests

they represent. It is both an economic and a political fight, which requires the mobilization of mass support among workers and a new, independent political strategy based on what workers need, not the profit interests of the corporations.

It is also a fight against the pro-corporate union bureaucracy, which, if forced to call a strike, will seek to isolate and betray it.

The WSWs *Health Care Workers Newsletter* urges Michigan Medicine workers to form a rank-and-file strike committee independent of the union apparatus to fight for the following demands:

- Safe nurse-to-patient ratios. Hire more nurses and support staff. The hospital must improve conditions so nurses can ensure their own health and safety and that of their patients.
- A halt to mandatory overtime and extended on-call hours. Nurses deserve a quality of life that is free from 16-hour shifts and being on call all hours of the day and night.
- A pay increase of 15 percent per year, plus cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) on a monthly basis so that wages keep up with rising inflation.
- Upgrade protections against COVID-19 and monkeypox. New and more dangerous COVID-19 variants are rising. Nurses need sufficient PPE, facility upgrades and proper procedures to ensure their health and safety on the job and to protect the health of their patients.

Vote to strike! Set a strike date of September 6!

Strike pay at full weekly wages!

Live-stream all contract talks and open negotiations to democratically elected representatives of the rank-and-file!

Answer strikebreaking with a general strike of all Michigan labor!



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