

Michigan hospital workers picket for improved wages and benefits at Trinity Health Grand Haven

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On April 28, a group of 30 Trinity Health workers organized a picket in front of the hospital in Grand Haven, Michigan, to protest their low wages and poor benefits that the workers say are intolerable.

The workers are members of a newly formed local of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) at the hospital. They are demanding that Trinity Health, a \$20 billion health care corporation based in Livonia, Michigan, end its refusal to negotiate a contract with them.

The employees fighting for improved wages and benefits are diagnostic imaging technologists, lab assistants and technologists, housekeepers, dietary workers, social workers, unit clerks, patient care associates, medics and workers in other positions at Trinity Grand Haven.

The facility, formerly part of an independent health care system and known as North Ottawa Community Hospital, was acquired by Trinity Health last October 1. The name of the hospital was then changed to Trinity Health Grand Haven.

Originally established as a community hospital in 1967, it has served the population of Grand Haven and surrounding communities and has been historically funded by taxes from six different towns in the area. The hospital has roots in the area that go back to 1920. Grand Haven is a town of approximately 11,000 people on Lake Michigan and approximately 30 miles west of Grand Rapids.

With the hospital facing severe financial challenges, Trinity Health sold the takeover to the community and staff as a path to improved health care and better wages and working conditions for hospital employees. However, these claims have been exposed as a pack of

lies.

The real aim of Trinity Health, as with other mergers and acquisitions in the more than \$10 trillion US health care services industry, was to strengthen its foothold in the growing northern Ottawa County health care market. Trinity Health, which already owns a hospital in Muskegon less than 15 miles north of Grand Haven, has been planning to leverage its control of both operations to cut costs.

By joining Trinity Health, North Ottawa became the ninth hospital in Michigan for the health care monopoly. The ostensibly non-profit Catholic health care system has 92 hospitals in 22 states with more than 120,000 employees, 5,300 physicians and \$4.1 billion in annual operating revenues.

In the state of Michigan, Trinity has 24,000 employees, 2,233 inpatient beds and 5,290 physicians and advanced practice providers. Its other hospitals and facilities are located in Alabama, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Oregon, Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

According to the latest published figures, the salaries of the top 15 executives at Trinity Health range from \$1.2 million for the Chief HR Officer to \$3 million for the director and CEO.

Meanwhile, the more than 200 workers at North Ottawa were also told that, in order to realize the potential of the Trinity Health acquisition, they needed to join the SEIU. This too has turned out to be a lie. SEIU has a long history of subordinating the interests of workers to the employers and the political relationships with the Democratic Party.

Like other hospital employees across Michigan,

around the US and internationally, the workers at Trinity Health Grand Haven are fighting against the expansion of corporate and financial interests in the health care industry.

As one of the workers at the picket on April 28 said during her presentation, Trinity Health is not offering the workers anything and has repeatedly prioritized their profits over patient care and adequate staffing. This is the exact same situation facing doctors, nurses and other hospital staff at the largest health care systems in Michigan such as Beaumont Health in Southfield, which recently acquired Spectrum Health in Grand Rapids, and Michigan Medicine in Ann Arbor, which recently acquired Sparrow Health in Lansing.

While SEIU Health Care Michigan has 17,000 members across the state, it has done nothing to mobilize the strength of the workers against this corporate assault on employees and patients alike. Instead, the SEIU has sought to divide workers and negotiate separate sellout agreements with each employer and keep the struggles of health care workers isolated from one another.

This SEIU strategy of helping the employers divide and conquer the workers is also combined with useless appeals to the Democrats in Lansing to take up the rights of hospital and medical services employees. Instead of marshaling the financial resources of the union, which are substantial, to establish a strike fund, the SEIU is giving workers' hard earned dues money as campaign contributions to the Democrats.

According to Transparency USA, which tracks political contributions, SEIU Healthcare of Michigan has given tens of thousands of dollars to Democratic Party candidates in each cycle of state and national election campaigns in recent years.

Trinity Health Grand Haven workers seeking to fight for their rights should recognize that a struggle needs to be taken up independently of the alliance of the employers, unions and Democrats, who represent the interests of the billionaires who are benefiting enormously from the consolidation of the health care industry.

Hospital workers need to form a rank-and-file committee that will take the fight against Trinity Health out of the hands of the union and place it under the democratic control of the workers themselves. Such an independent organization of workers can then establish

connections with other rank-and-file committees in the health care industry and other sectors such as auto manufacturing, education and the railroads.

The campaign for the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is laying the basis for a coordinated struggle by the entire working class against the capitalist system for socialism, that is, the operation of vital resources such as health care based on what is needed by the public and not what is in the interests of a tiny handful of financial parasites.



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