

Reject the illegitimate vote and scare tactics! Nurses already voted down agreement!

## 5-day strike at California Rady Children's Hospital called off as nurses forced to vote on identical agreement

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The five-day strike planned next week by 1,600 nurses at Rady Children's Hospital in San Diego, California, has been called off after a snap vote Thursday on a tentative agreement (TA) was ratified. The agreement was nearly identical to what nurses had voted to reject just the week before. However, it was put before them again by their union, the United Nurses of Children's Hospital (UNOCH) Local 1699, an affiliate of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The acceptance of the TA was announced by UNOCH Wednesday, and nurses were only given Thursday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. to vote. By 7 p.m. the union announced the contract had been ratified, with 813 nurses (54.6 percent) voting "yes" and 675 (45.4 percent) voting "no."

Nurses had already rejected a nearly identical TA on August 6, shortly following a two-day strike. They rejected the deal for the third time that outlined a 9 percent wage increase in year one and then two subsequent 4 percent wage increases in years two and three of the contract. In rejecting the offer last week, 42.2 percent voted in favor, 57.8 percent voted against the contract.

In an attempt to flip the vote, Rady Children's made no concessions on wages, emphasizing it was their "Last, Best and Final Offer," while using the scare tactic that if this latest TA were not approved, they would reduce the first year wage increase from 9 percent to 8 percent. To this they added the \$1,000 signing bonus, which is somehow being hailed as \$1.6 million by the hospital and union, despite the math not adding up.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to nurses who

learned of the ratification at the end of their shifts on Thursday. Nurses described to reporters that "people are disappointed" and "it sucks," as some stressed they felt that UNOCH was mirroring intimidation from the hospital, with one emphasizing that "A lot of scare tactics were used by both. The only thing we got was a \$1,000 bonus and that's it. There was enormous pressure to sign."

Another nurse told the WSWs, "The mood in the hospital is one of disappointment." The contract "passed very narrowly, something like 54 to 46." She added that "we knew that the union wouldn't have gotten anything better."

"We don't get paid enough compared to other hospitals," she said. "I'm a single mom with two kids and I pay \$1,000 a month in health insurance and I work for Rady's. It was only until a few years ago that it used to be free for us. Then with inflation and it's just too much to live here in San Diego."

"I know people that work here who live in their cars," added another nurse at the end of her shift.

Many nurses report having to take on second jobs and are unable to bring their own children to the hospital where they work, which is one of the best in the country and the fifth largest children's hospital in the country and the largest on the West Coast.

The tentative agreement must be rejected as illegitimate since workers have already voted it down. Its slim passage does not reflect support for the agreement as much as it does the lack of confidence in UNOCH to bring back a better offer. The fact that the "no" vote

remained so high despite the scare tactics shows the degree of determination by nurses to fight for a living wage and access to the medical care they provide.

UNOCH admitted it was presenting the identical deal to its members, informing them with the snap vote, “This new Agreement includes the exact terms of the August 3, 2024 Tentative Agreement with an additional ... \$1,000 bonus for every RN ... This new agreement moves no parts around and takes nothing away from the August 3, 2024, Tentative Agreement.”

By continuing to push the same contract on nurses and bringing the vote before the membership, UNOCH was sending a message to nurses that they would not be fighting for anything more and played the central role in wearing them down until the contract was “passed.” Furthermore, nurses who are already underpaid, were told the maximum they can receive for strike pay this next week was \$100 per day, which maxed out at \$400, despite it being a five-day strike.

When the nurses went on a two-day strike July 22-24, the hospital was forced to pay for 400 travel nurses to cover the strike, and it was uncertain how the administration was going to secure enough travel nurses to cover the five-day strike. All efforts were being taken by Rady and the union to ensure that next week’s strike would not proceed.

The duplicitous actions by UNOCH are not unique, but reflect the ties between the corporatist trade unions and the corporations. Autoworkers across numerous plants have been through similar experiences where they have been told by the United Auto Workers (UAW) that they must continue to vote and revote on identical contracts that they have previously rejected. This happened to thousands of autoworkers in various contract struggles in 2022 from Deere, to Volvo and Dana, where one worker noted, “This is the same as the first contract, with ‘sprinkles.’”

UNOCH admits to the concessions in a statement that reads, “While we realize this last offer is not perfect, our collective efforts over the last few months have resulted in the best contract offer in decades. The across-the-board wage increases and market adjustments make us competitive or surpassing other San Diego hospitals.” The statement is also an admission that they have continued to accept poor contracts if the current contract is in fact the “best” offer “in decades.”

The cost of living across the US, in California, and in its major metropolitan areas have skyrocketed. So much so that in the last year San Diego placed first as the most

expensive city in the country, according to the latest *U.S. News & World Report*.

According to a July 2024 report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) in San Diego has risen 3.5 percent over the last 12 months, a figure 2 percent higher than the national average.

Nurses continue to cite the deep “moral injury” they have experienced since the pandemic, when they cared for patients on the front lines of the pandemic without PPE and watched large numbers of patients, and even their own coworkers, succumb to the virus. The nightmarish situation faced by so many in the healthcare industry as the result of lack of infrastructure and preparedness planning to deal with epidemics, as well as the profit motive in healthcare that incentivizes “lean” staffing models, has exacerbated the exodus of nurses from the field.

As the region’s only Level I pediatric trauma center, Rady Children’s hospital has been at the forefront of crises in healthcare that include chronic and severe understaffing and emergency room crowding. These conditions are now the norm in hospitals and healthcare facilities across the country as the trade union bureaucracies, primarily tied to the Democratic Party and representing the interests of the healthcare giants, have refused to wage an industry-wide struggle.

A broad movement of healthcare workers globally, who are all fighting for safe staffing and significant wage gains, must be built. The assault on healthcare must be halted and requires a unified struggle of healthcare workers and nurses across the globe. This struggle can only be waged independently of the two capitalist parties who stand in opposition to the interests of workers and are working to funnel all of society’s wealth into imperialist war.

Rady’s nurses and healthcare workers more broadly should contact the WSWs today for assistance in building rank-and-file committees to take forward the fight to organize a new leadership to defend the jobs and conditions of healthcare workers.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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