

Claiming “Victory in Sight,” ONA bureaucracy recommends sellout contract for striking Providence nurses

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We invite medical workers at Providence and across the country to write to us about the conditions they face as a result of the ongoing social crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the emerging threats on public health by the Trump administration.

The Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) announced Friday that they have reached a tentative agreement with Providence Health & Services on behalf of 5,000 Oregon nurses currently on strike. Claiming the contract is a “victory,” bargaining teams at seven of the eight hospitals have “strongly recommended” that nurses agree to the deal.

The ONA bureaucracy is holding a snap vote, which began on Sunday and is concluding today. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees urge workers to reject this sellout, as they did the last one two weeks ago.

The agreement is a complete betrayal of nurses, who have waged a powerful six-week strike. If ONA officials succeed in forcing it through, nurses and their patients will face devastating consequences.

The wage increases are the same as the initial deal presented to nurses, which was voted down in December, and is not commensurate with other hospital networks in the region, such as Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU). There are no changes to time off and only 75 percent retroactive pay, not the full 100 percent demanded by the rank and file.

Above all, there are no significant changes to implementing safe staffing ratios, which has been the chief demand of nurses so they can care for their patients to the best of their abilities. According to the deal, the severity of a patient’s diagnosis will only be “factored into staffing plans.” This is corporate double

speak for doing nothing.

One nurse commented on social media, “I’m not seeing anything that improves on patient safety as Providence has tried to remove safe staffing language on the first TA.”

Nurses have also commented that the contract at Providence Portland Medical Center, one of the hospital network’s largest facilities, does not expire at the same time as at others, especially the other major hospital, Providence St. Vincent. This would serve to divide and weaken workers in future struggles.

As one nurse asked, “How is this TA different to the one we had in December? Prov Portland isn’t aligned with the other contracts and we’ve caved on every other bargaining item. We [struck] for 6 weeks and it’s not changed.”

The overwhelming support the nurses have received from other sections of workers, such as Oregon’s teachers and UPS workers, make clear that this struggle could be expanded. Nurses are fighting the same problems faced by workers in Oregon and across the country: inadequate pay, health insurance, paid time off, staffing levels and overwork.

But instead of uniting these struggles, the ONA and its parent organization, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the AFL-CIO have deliberately isolated the strike and sought to starve nurses into submission.

The militancy of the striking nurses represents the anger of hundreds of thousands of nurses and millions of other workers across the US who face the same conditions. This has brought the rank and file in direct conflict with the ONA bureaucracy, behind which stands the vast apparatus of the American Nurses

Association (ANA) and AFT.

“ONA doesn’t want to lose political capital so they’re pushing this as a win, but Providence is the clear winner here. We are getting the same contracts they rolled out in 2024 and lapping it up,” wrote one worker, noting how the ONA apparatus is attempting to spin the contract.

The strike represents the opening shot of healthcare workers against the Trump administration. Last week, hundreds of nurses at Geisinger hospitals in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania conducted a five-day strike, and 20,000 University of California nurse case managers, mental health counselors, pharmacists and lab technicians plan a three-day walkout starting February 26.

The appointment of the anti-science quack Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to head the department of Health and Human Services is part of a frontal assault on public health. This is a central component of the administration’s aim to establish a presidential dictatorship to destroy social services and funnel even more tax cuts and money to the oligarchy.

To break the isolation of the Oregon nurses struggle, the *World Socialist Web Site* urge nurses to form rank-and-file committees, democratically elected from the clinic floor, to ensure nurses’ demands are actually met. These committees must be independent of and in opposition to both corporate-backed parties.

The Democratic Party, which dominates Portland and state politics, have acted as a critical break on the efforts by the rank and file in their fight. It was not an accident that the second TA was presented to the membership after the intervention of Governor Tina Kotek.

It is also not an accident that the current sellout TA was recommended to nurses only days after the Portland City Council, which includes members of the pseudo-left Democratic Socialist of America (DSA), called on Providence and the ONA to resume bargaining. The Democrats, responsible for the so-called “safe staffing” law, which has in fact made staffing ratios worse for many units, have worked closely with the ONA bureaucracy to ensure that the strike never challenged Providence’s bottom line.

The defeat of this deal must be followed by the removal of the discredited ONA bargaining committee and its replacement with a rank-and-file negotiating

committee made up of the most trusted, class conscious and militant workers.

At the same time, this strike must be expanded. Providence owns 51 hospitals across the western US, and there are hundreds of thousands of medical workers in the country as a whole. There are also hundreds of thousands of federal workers whose jobs are being destroyed, including US Postal Service workers, who are raising directly the question of a general strike in all industries.

Regardless of the outcome of the vote, nurses must form their own rank-and-file committees to democratically enforce the will of the membership and oversee workplace conditions, including safe staffing levels. The battle in Oregon must also become the spearhead of a fight to take profit out of medicine and establish a socialist medical system, to guarantee the right to high quality, free healthcare for all.



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