

Union cancels Connecticut nursing home strike, rams through sellout deal

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A statewide nursing home strike in Connecticut was canceled after an agreement was reached last Friday between SEIU 1199NE and Democratic Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont. The strike would have involved over 6,400 caregivers across 51 nursing homes and 193 group homes for individuals with disabilities.

Union members were forced to vote on this tentative agreement the same morning it was reached, giving them no time to study or consider its details. While SEIU 1199NE President Rob Baril claimed the deal made “important and meaningful progress toward livable wages” and provided “substantial funding increases,” in reality the agreement fell well short of the \$30 an hour demanded by workers.

The deal was announced the same day that the International Association of Machinists announced a deal to shut down the three-week Pratt & Whitney strike in Connecticut. The contract was rammed through in a similar fashion in a vote Tuesday, with workers not even receiving “highlights” until entering the ratification meeting, prompting many workers to storm out in protest.

For the SEIU contract, Governor Lamont claimed the agreement provided Medicaid payment increases to nursing homes and group homes to fund wage increases for certified nursing assistants (CNAs) to \$26 per hour by January 1, 2028.

Meanwhile, group home workers’ pay will increase from a poverty level \$18 to \$20 per hour in the same period. This paltry wage increase is not only far short of the \$30 per hour sought by workers, but it will not keep pace with inflation, especially given the likely repercussions of the Trump administration’s threatened tariffs and pursuit of global war.

Moreover, the promised funding by the state does not directly guarantee anything to workers, as both wages and benefits will need to be negotiated between the separate nursing home and group home companies and the SEIU.

The funding itself still needs to be passed by the Connecticut General Assembly.

Governor Lamont’s intervention in the negotiations was designed to protect the healthcare industry and the fragile capitalist establishment as a whole from the consequences of a strike. Lamont understands that any coordinated struggle of any section of the working class under the present conditions could spark wider action, especially under the explosive political conditions created by the right-wing policies of the Trump administration.

Lamont, whose net worth is estimated at tens of millions of dollars, intervened to stop a strike of Connecticut nursing homes in 2021. He had declared during that strike that he was prepared to deploy the National Guard. Ultimately he had no need to do so, because then, as now, the SEIU called off the strike and reached a sellout agreement that met none of workers’ demands.

SEIU 1199NE is the 29,000-member New England branch of the massive 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East (UHWE), a local with more than 450,000 members across the Eastern United States. UHWE covers workers in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland, Washington D.C. and Florida.

In the leadup to the present strike, hundreds of nursing home workers in western New York, also members of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, went on strike on May 20 to demand better pay, staffing levels and pensions.

The 1199SEIU leadership deliberately delayed the start of the Connecticut strike, originally set to coincide with the New York strike, so it would not overlap with the New York action in order to isolate New York workers.

Before the strike even began, the scope of the New York strike had been narrowed through separate agreements to just five facilities, sidelining hundreds of workers. The union purposely limited the strike to just one week, ending it before the strike at Connecticut

nursing homes was set to begin.

Having sold out the New York workers, the union then reached an agreement with the governor in Connecticut to avert the strike in that state as well.

The union bureaucracy is corrupt, socially detached and contemptuous of the interests and priorities of the rank and file. This was shown in a recent corruption scandal, which led to the ousting of George Gresham as the longtime president of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. Tens of thousands of dollars embezzled from workers' dues money served to supplement his \$300,000 salary.

His replacement, Yvonne Armstrong, is another longtime bureaucrat, elected in a vote marked by more than 90 percent abstention, reflecting the deep alienation felt by workers to the apparatus.

Massive cuts to Medicaid

Lamont's promise to increase Medicaid reimbursements may never be realized, given massive cuts under the new federal spending bill. The House of Representatives has passed the so-called "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" that includes cuts of \$700 billion from the Medicaid program, in line with Republican and Trump administration priorities to dismantle public spending.

Nursing homes rely heavily on Medicaid. In Connecticut, over 80 percent of nursing home revenue is from state Medicaid spending. These cuts pose a direct threat to all workers and to the jobs of workers in the healthcare industry, especially nursing homes and group homes.

Furthermore, the nursing home industry is aggressively lobbying and suing to overturn the Biden administration's minimum staffing mandate. This mandate, which will not even take effect until May 2026, requires a number of minimum nurse staffing hours per resident per day. The regulation, while inadequate, would increase staffing at four out of five homes nationwide, which are chronically understaffed.

The nursing home industry claims any such staffing minimums are unaffordable. Even in those states which have stricter legal minimums on staffing at nursing homes, nursing home companies routinely ignore existing laws and often will pay minor fees rather than properly staff the facilities.

In his first term, Trump already eased fines against nursing homes for poor care and has sought to strip regulations. In his second term, the industry is ramping up pressure to rescind the staffing "mandate" before it ever takes effect. The "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" also includes a moratorium on efforts to increase staffing levels.

The nursing home industry's relentless pursuit of profit over patient needs is abetted by the allegiance of the union bureaucracy to the political and corporate establishment.

The betrayal in Connecticut underscores the urgent need for workers to break free from the control of the SEIU bureaucracy. Workers must form rank-and-file committees to move forward with a genuine fight for livable wages, safe staffing and decent working conditions.

These committees, democratically elected and controlled by the workers themselves, will break the isolation imposed by the union officials and coordinate united action across the healthcare industry and among the broader working class in every part of the country.

Workers throughout the country and around the world all share common interests and face a common threat to their jobs, standard of living and democratic rights brought by the crisis of capitalism and the global descent into authoritarianism. The drive for profit, attacks on social programs and the build-up to world war is undermining all the gains of workers made over centuries of struggle.

Workers must build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and prepare a social counteroffensive against the Trump administration and the profit system.



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