

Henry Ford Genesys nurses and case workers face Teamsters sellout as strike enters third week

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The determined strike by more than 700 nurses and case workers at Henry Ford Health Genesys Hospital in Grand Blanc, Michigan is about to enter its third week. The healthcare workers, who walked out on September 1, are fighting for safe staffing levels, decent pay and the protection of previously secured benefits against the brutal offensive of a multibillion-dollar corporate healthcare giant.

Having voted down a concessions contract by 93 percent in August, the strikers have demonstrated their resolve to win their demands. However, the courageous stand of the strikers is in grave danger.

Workers are confronting a battle on two fronts: on one side, a ruthless strikebreaking operation by Henry Ford Health, and on the other, the systematic effort by the Teamsters bureaucracy to isolate and sabotage the strike, setting the stage for a sellout contract that gives the hospital everything it wants.

The Teamsters apparatus, which has a long and sordid record of betraying workers' struggles, is actively blocking any independent initiative by the nurses while promoting illusions in the Democratic Party, which is part of the very capitalist political establishment that enforces the subordination of healthcare to corporate profits.

To win their fight, striking nurses must take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands. This requires the formation of an independent, democratically-controlled rank-and-file committee to break the isolation imposed by the union bureaucracy, mobilize the full strength of all hospital workers to shut down the strikebreaking operation, and link up with the growing movement of the working class against austerity and inequality.

The central issue in the strike is the dangerously high nurse-to-patient ratios, which workers say have created a nightmare for both staff and patients. Since Henry Ford Health acquired the hospital from Ascension in 2024, conditions have deteriorated significantly. Nurses report being assigned up to 10 or 11 patients at a time, and sometimes even 13, when safe ratios would be between one nurse to four patients or one nurse to five patients.

One nurse explained, "They have been giving new nurses, six months out of nursing school, 10 patients."

These impossible workloads have a direct and deadly impact on patient care. "There are studies that show that with every extra patient you add to a nurses workload, mortality goes up 7 percent,"

one nurse on the picket line said. Another added, "In the last four years I have never seen more breakdowns, falls, infected IVs. You can't keep track of everything."

Henry Ford management claims that mandated ratios are "inconsistent with system-best practices" and hinder "adaptability," which would make the hospital unprofitable. This argument exposes the priorities of Henry Ford Health, which is seeking to provide health care to maximize profits, not to provide services to the public.

Management also blames nurses for the staffing crisis, citing an increase in "call-offs," which Henry Ford claims are incentivized by a premium pay clause in the old contract. The nurses reject this, pointing out that management has systematically failed to recruit and retain staff, leading to burnout and a hemorrhaging of experienced nurses.

The strike is also a fight to defend pay and benefits won in previous struggles. Henry Ford is seeking to impose a single, system-wide policy, which means scrapping previously negotiated terms at Genesys. This includes cuts to holiday pay from double-time to time-and-a-half, and changes to overtime, which now only begins after 40 hours a week instead of after a scheduled shift.

One nurse stated that the health insurance Henry Ford offers its own employees is too expensive for them to afford. A central demand is for pay commensurate with other Flint-area hospitals to help retain staff.

Henry Ford Health has responded to the strike with an all-out strikebreaking operation, keeping the hospital open with contract nurses, or scabs, and staff who have crossed the picket line. The hospital is paying these scabs up to \$8,500 per week, plus stipends and hotel costs. As nurses correctly point out, this proves the company has the money to meet their demands for safe staffing and better pay.

The use of unqualified scabs places patients in extreme danger. Strikers report that the replacement workers are unfamiliar with the hospital's charting system and equipment, and that many are "underqualified" for their assignments.

One nurse stated bluntly that scabs are scabs because they "make too many errors in care to hold down permanent jobs," and it is difficult to track their mistakes as they move from hospital to hospital. Strikers have heard rumors from inside the hospital of dangerously poor care, including one horrific account of a

breached baby who was transferred out too late to be saved.

While management wages war on the striking nurses—terminating their insurance coverage and threatening other unionized workers against showing support—the Teamsters bureaucracy has done nothing to stop the scabbing.

Critically, support staff represented by AFSCME Local 3518 are crossing the picket lines every day. The Teamsters and AFSCME leadership collaborated to isolate the nurses, with AFSCME officials rushing to settle their own contract on August 22, just before the nurses' strike began.

Teamsters officials have told strikers that it would be "illegal" for AFSCME members to join the strike, a well-worn lie used by union bureaucrats to divide workers and enforce management's dictates.

Negotiations are not taking place. A session scheduled for September 10 was cancelled when Henry Ford representatives failed to show up. Another recent meeting, overseen by a federal mediator, was deemed "unproductive" by Teamsters Local 332 President Dan Glass. Negotiations resumed on Thursday without progress, according to local news reports, and there are currently no plans for another meeting.

However, there is every indication that management has no reason to bargain when the Teamsters bureaucracy keeps the strike isolated and toothless. Henry Ford is relying on the union apparatus to help it exhaust the strike and force the workers back to work under the terms of a sellout agreement which will be presented as "the best we can do."

Instead of mobilizing the working class to defend the strike, the Teamsters bureaucracy has sought to channel the strikers' anger into the dead end of capitalist politics. On September 11, the union organized a rally at the picket line featuring Democratic Party politicians, including Genesee County Sheriff Christopher Swanson, who has announced his candidacy for governor of Michigan in the 2026 elections.

The hypocrisy of the Teamsters' embrace of Democratic politicians was on full display when union officials harassed reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* on the picket line on September 16. They accused the WSWS of "sowing division" and bringing "politics into the strike."

However, when asked how it was that the Teamsters had no problem bringing the politics of Democratic Party candidate for Michigan governor Swanson to the picket line, the mouthpieces for the union bureaucracy and isolation of the strike had no response.

Despite these efforts by the union bureaucracy, nurses on the picket line spoke powerfully about their struggle. An OR (operating room) nurse declared, "I don't think healthcare should be a business. We are talking about people's lives." Another said, "We just want safe care. Safe staffing saves lives. They should set nationwide standards across the board."

Showing WSWS reporters an ad for scab pay of between \$7,168 and \$8,536 per week plus a stipend being offered by Henry Ford Health, one nurse remarked, "This is not being reported on the news. And they try to say we are asking for too much."

Another nurse connected the immediate crisis to broader social issues: "With the retirement of the baby boomers conditions are

going to get worse. The CEO of Ford complains about the nursing shortage, but there is no investment in education in the United States."

Her coworker added, "The whole private healthcare system doesn't work. You can't have golden on the outside and rotten within. It should be golden on the inside." Another striker passionately explained the human cost of understaffing: "We don't just do physical labor, we work with our minds. ... Sometimes we are up to 10 or 11 patients. If you divide that by, say \$42 an hour, that is \$4 a patient. Is that what a patient is worth?"

Her coworker expressed her determination, saying, "I am prepared to stay out here for a while. Otherwise, the nursing shortage will get worse and worse. ... We are doing too much. It creates burnout."

The strike at Henry Ford Health Genesys Hospital is coming to a denouement. The policy of the Teamsters bureaucracy of isolating the strike, allowing scabbing to continue, and promoting Democratic Party politicians is a recipe for defeat. It is the same strategy that led to the betrayal of the 2024 contract struggle at this very hospital and countless other struggles, including the recent sellout of 340,000 UPS workers.

The embrace of Trump by the national Teamsters leadership further exposes the bureaucracy as a pro-corporate agency of the billionaires that is hostile to the struggle of the working class for its interests.

The only way forward is for the striking nurses and case workers to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the union functionaries. This means forming a rank-and-file strike committee, democratically controlled by the workers themselves, to fight for what is necessary, not what Henry Ford Health and its stooges in the Teamsters claim is "affordable."

Such a committee would immediately make a direct appeal to the AFSCME-represented hospital staff to defy their own sellout leadership and join the strike to shut down the hospital completely. The committee would also organize mass picketing to stop the scabs from entering the facility by turning to the broader working class—autoworkers in Flint, teachers, logistics workers, and others—for active support.

The fight for safe staffing and quality healthcare is the fight of the entire working class, which relies on this critical community resource. The struggle at Henry Ford Genesys is part of the class struggle globally against the capitalist system, which subordinates every aspect of life, including health and safety, to the accumulation of private profit.



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