

Strike by Henry Ford Genesys nurses in sixth week, as management ramps up strikebreaking

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The strike by over 700 nurses at Henry Ford Genesys Hospital in Grand Blanc Township near Flint, Michigan, is entering its sixth week. Talks this week between the company and the Teamsters union reportedly produced no settlement on the key issue of safe nurse-to-patient staffing ratios.

Henry Ford Health acquired the operations of what was Grand Blanc Genesys Hospital through a joint venture with Ascension Michigan in 2024. Henry Ford Health is seeking to implement a single policy across all of its facilities, including drastically increasing existing staffing ratios at Genesys.

Management has stepped up its strikebreaking efforts in recent days, filing a court injunction to remove strikers' tents, chairs, burn barrels and other gear from what it claims is company property along Holly and Baldwin roads. The Teamsters union bureaucracy readily agreed to these demands.

Nurses also report receiving notices from Henry Ford management offering them 5 percent raises if they cross picket lines and return to work on an individual basis. Meanwhile, strikebreakers are being paid \$8,500 weekly plus stipends.

These provocative actions by management take place as 46,000 Kaiser Permanente nurses and other healthcare professionals across California, Oregon and Hawaii are set to strike October 14. Among their key issues are unsafe staffing levels and substandard pay.

The coming together of the two strikes underscores the need for Genesys nurses to break the isolation of their strike and mobilize the broadest support from healthcare workers, autoworkers and other sections of the working class in the area and across the country.

The fight by Genesys nurses is taking place as nearly 10,000 nurses at nine Corewell Health facilities in southeast Michigan continue negotiations for a first contract. The nurses voted last year to join the Teamsters.

Colleen, a striking Genesys Health nurse, told reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I don't think people realize how really bad healthcare is right now. It is not going to change until people stand up and say, 'We pay a lot of money for our healthcare, we deserve the best care as a patient.' We did not become nurses to give substandard care. That's not why we are

out here. It is heartbreaking."

Nurses said that while the union had agreed to take down strikers' tents on what Henry Ford claimed was its property, a homeowner along Holly Road near the hospital had agreed to let the strikers keep their tents. "A family member was a coal miner," Colleen explained. "So they knew all about the strikes."

Angela, another nurse, said, "The community has been very supportive, but there is a lack of knowledge. They know we are here, but they don't really know the reasons why we are striking.

"The news has been out here, but Henry Ford has been putting out a lot of lies. Talking about our excess call-ins, which wasn't accurate. They included FMLA [Family Medical Leave Act] in the call-ins. That is always going to be an issue no matter what hospital you are at."

Facing a news blackout and misrepresentation of their cause in the corporate media, striking nurses have sought to leaflet other, nonunion Henry Ford hospitals in the area to raise awareness of their struggle. It was reported that management in at least one case responded by summoning police to remove strikers attempting to leaflet Henry Ford Providence Novi Hospital.

The WSWS explained the need for rank-and-file committees and for the strike to be expanded across the Henry Ford Health System, a multibillion-dollar healthcare "nonprofit" with assets of around \$1.5 billion. It also owns Health Alliance Plan (HAP), which strikers point out is another massive source of revenue. Henry Ford Health CEO Bob Riney received some \$4.5 million in total compensation in 2023, according to public filings.

Angela said she was glad to see the Kaiser Permanente nurses taking a stand. She said that this could strengthen the fight at Genesys and that management understood this. "They see Kaiser is going out. They are going to have a harder time getting scabs in there. So they are taking desperate measures against us now."

"This community needs all three hospitals, Hurley, McLaren and us. When flu season hits, every hospital bed is full.

Everyone's ER wait is six to eight to 15 hours."

Angela pointed out that Henry Ford Genesys paid starting nurses less than at other area hospitals, making it difficult to hire and retain sufficient staff. "There are two other hospitals in the surrounding area. Why would you come here when you can make \$3 to \$5 more an hour down the road? You are not going to get a new nurse to come here when they can go elsewhere. We have to at least be competitive to retain staff."

Another nurse added, "You get one critical patient, with all other patients you have, it is going to eat up your time. The other patients are not going to get the care they need."

Angela said, "You can't really critically think. You are just tasking. You are not able plan ahead, call a doctor."

"Some of us don't work just one 12-hour shift. We work two or three in a row."

Several nurses said they were familiar with the prosecution of Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) nurse RaDonda Vaught for criminally negligent homicide and abuse in the death of an elderly patient accidentally given the wrong medication. Vaught had been scapegoated for the chronic understaffing of the health system.

Angela said, "We are tired of being put in those bad situations. We want to take care of people, but we need to be able to take care of them safely and effectively. At the end of the day, that is not happening."

"These are people's lives. They are human beings. And they need to be treated like that. Corporate greed needs to stop. Big pharma needs to be stopped. The culture needs to change."

"It's all about the money, which is heartbreaking when it comes to healthcare because that should not be the case."

Asked what she thought about the sending of National Guard to cities like Portland and Chicago by President Trump, one veteran nurse said she supported it, citing the need to fight crime.

WSWS reporters explained that troops would be used to repress the working class. They pointed to the history of the area, where federal troops had been mobilized in the 1930s in an unsuccessful attempt to crush the Flint sit-down strike at General Motors that gave birth to the United Auto Workers.

Several other workers said that they were reluctant to talk about politics, feeling it was divisive. Angela confessed, "You can't have those kinds of conversations anymore because of people being so opinionated. People get so heated. If I don't share your views, some people get upset."

WSWS reporters explained that life-and-death political questions are facing the working class, which cannot be avoided.

At one point, Teamsters Local 332 President Dan Glass approached WSWS reporters to say he objected to the report posted on the WSWS stating the union leadership had "immediately buckled" to the hospital's demands to remove strike tents. The company threatened to take the union to court on the absurd grounds that tents and chairs posed a threat to

public safety.

Glass attempted to defend the decision not to fight the company's demands, stating that the union chose not fight because it was a secondary issue.

He also suggested that the WSWS was undermining the fight of nurses by introducing the question of politics.

The WSWS warned that caving in to the demand to remove strike tents, a clear attack on workers' First Amendment rights, undermined the fight of nurses, especially as cold weather and longer nights approach. Reporters pointed out that the Teamsters President Sean O'Brien openly supported President Trump, a fascist, who was seeking to crush the democratic rights of the working class by force. Several nurses nodded in agreement.

The fact that the Teamster leadership supports Trump demonstrates that the union bureaucracy is not concerned with defending the interests of workers. Trump has slashed funding for healthcare and declared war on public health, appointing right-wing anti-vaccine quack Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to head the Department of Health and Human Services.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration has launched a frontal attack on the Constitution, attempting to set up a presidential dictatorship based on the police, military and fascist thugs.

The fight of Genesys nurses can only be successful to the extent that it is linked as part of the fight of all healthcare workers and the working class more broadly. The issues at Genesys are not local but national and international. Healthcare is being systematically dismantled to further enrich the billionaires and fund war.

To widen the fight, nurses must build a rank-and-file strike committee, democratically controlled by the nurses themselves and independent of the pro-corporate Teamsters officials.

Such a committee would formulate nurses' non-negotiable demands, starting with mandatory nurse-to-patient ratios, and a fight to expand the strike by appealing to healthcare workers at other Henry Ford hospitals and Corewell across the area and nationally.

For more information on how to get involved contact the WSWS using the form below.



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