

# Teamsters President O'Brien steps in to prepare sellout of Henry Ford Genesys Hospital nurses' strike

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The strike by approximately 700 nurses and case workers at Henry Ford Genesys Hospital in Grand Blanc, Michigan, has now entered its eighth week.

This struggle, centered on reversing debilitating staffing shortages and defending previous gains, finds itself at a critical juncture. Management is operating the hospital by hiring scab nurses for than \$100 per hour, and Henry Ford Health management has expressed gratitude towards nurses who have chosen to resign from the union and return to work as part of its strikebreaking campaign.

Meanwhile, management is claiming that the hospital “cannot and will not” meet the nurses’ demands regarding premium pay, attendance and staffing levels.

Management’s ruthlessness can only be answered through the expansion and escalation of the struggle by workers. Nurses must organize and appeal for support among workers across western Michigan, the Henry Ford Health system and US healthcare workers as a whole. This month’s strike by 45,000 workers at Kaiser Permanente on the West Coast shows that the conditions are emerging for a powerful national movement in defense of high quality healthcare.

Instead, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters has been systematically isolating the strike. This underscores the need for workers to take matters into their own hands through a rank-and-file strike committee, providing them with the means to take the initiative and carry out strategic decisions made democratically by the workers as a whole.

The conflict between the strikers and the bureaucracy was revealed by the picket line visit last Thursday by Teamsters General President Sean M. O’Brien and General Secretary-Treasurer Fred Zuckerman.

O’Brien, delivering his typical profanity-laced remarks, referred to himself several times as a “tough guy” from Boston and denounced Henry Ford Health as a “white collar crime syndicate” and the hospital as a “schoolyard bully.” He vowed that the Teamsters would “make certain that these white collar crime syndicates are held accountable and give you the contract that you deserve.” He added that the union will continue to “fight this week and next week.”

But O’Brien offered no concrete strategy of proposals for how the strike could be won. This is because, behind his hot air, the real purpose of his visit is to help shut the strike down. It recalls a similar visit to the picket line of 8,000 Philadelphia municipal workers by AFSCME President Lee Saunders, which was followed within days by the cancellation of the strike and the announcement of a sellout agreement.

O’Brien’s real record speaks for itself. He has been directly involved in major contract sellouts, most notably the 2023 UPS agreement covering 340,000 workers. The Teamsters used a bogus “strike ready” campaign to present that contract as the product of hard bargaining. Since then, tens of thousands of UPS workers have lost their jobs due to automation and other measures, while the Teamsters have only occasionally broken their guilty silence.

Under the Biden administration, O’Brien played a key role in blocking a national rail strike, traveling to the White House several times in the lead-up to the vote in Congress to impose a contract. Today, he is among the most strident supporters of the Trump regime on “America First” grounds, and he spoke at the Republican National Convention.

The record of O’Brien exposes the claim that the pro-

management union bureaucracy can be “reformed.” He was elected in 2021, on record-low turnout, with the support of the Democratic Socialists of America, *Labor Notes* and its affiliated Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) faction. Even after O’Brien had been exposed as a fascist supporter, TDU members continue to occupy top posts in his administration.

Recent statements by Teamsters Local 332 President Dan Glass suggest that the union is trying to lower nurses’ expectations. Speaking to Michigan Public Radio, he sought to downplay the union’s objectives, suggesting the striking workers are not demanding anything new.

Glass stated that the union is focused on preservation, saying, “As far as their statement about the things we demand, we’re demanding that they leave our contract alone,” and that the union is only seeking to keep the previous contract terms. He explicitly emphasized that the union is not asking for more.

Glass said that nurses have ratios in their contract that specify how many patients a nurse in a department should have, but the hospital does not want to commit to honoring those. This is the “status quo” that union officials have accepted at hospitals across America.

But nurses voted 93 percent to reject the hospital’s contract in August and to go on strike to push above all for safe nurse-to-patient ratios. On the picket line, striking nurses have repeatedly spoken out and explained the dangerous conditions they face due to understaffing. The nurses have detailed the unbearable burden of attempting to care for too many patients during a shift.

Meanwhile, hospital management has slandered nurses for “rampant absenteeism,” which they are using to justify eliminating overtime hours.

The strike is at a critical juncture. Either nurses and case workers take control of the struggle through the formation of a rank-and-file strike committee, or the strike will be betrayed.

A central aim of the committee would be to break through the isolation of the strike and mobilize other hospital employees and the working class in the area to stop the scabbing.

The committee would also be tasked with reaching out to and mobilizing other hospital employees, unionized and non-unionized alike, at Henry Ford Genesys and across the entire Henry Ford Health

system and to hospital workers at the other healthcare systems in the area, such Corewell Health.

The rank-and-file committee must begin not with what Henry Ford claims it can afford, which is where the bureaucracy begins, but by what nurses and patients urgently need.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, which supports the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), stands ready to assist. For more information, fill out the form below.



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