

# Henry Ford Health says it will impose contract terms on striking nurses at Genesys Hospital

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Management at Henry Ford Health has announced it is unilaterally imposing a new contract on 700 nurses and case workers at Genesys Hospital in Grand Blanc, Michigan after declaring an impasse in negotiations.

The workers, members of Teamsters Local 332, have been on strike since September 1 to demand an end to unsafe staffing ratios, overwork and steadily eroding working conditions.

This latest provocation by management—following their strikebreaking efforts, which included the hiring of scab nurses—is an escalation of Henry Ford Health’s attempt to break the will of the nurses.

According to recent news reports and the hospital’s own statements, Henry Ford Genesys Hospital management announced last week that it would begin unilateral implementation of contract terms, claiming negotiations had “reached an impasse” after months of deadlock.

Justifying its action, the hospital touted wage increases of up to 8.6 percent, a promise of a more “comprehensive and competitive” benefits package, and the stated intention to maintain previously agreed staffing ratios. The hospital claimed nurses will see an average salary increase of 5.3 percent in the first year under these terms.

But on the picket line Thursday, nurses denounced the move. One nurse said, “They are declaring an impasse, but legally we have not come to that. We were already working under a system where there are supposed to be staffing ratios, but they are never met. Now they want to remove them completely.”

In addition to the fact that the new contract does not address the number one issue among nurses—mandatory staff-to-patient ratios—the claimed wage increases do

not even rise to one-half of the cumulative increase in the cost of living over the last three years, which is 11 percent.

While the hospital previously hired scab nurses at more than \$100 an hour to keep operations running, management is refusing to budge from insufficient wage increases, hoping to force nurses back on the job on the hospital’s terms.

A younger nurse, who went into the profession during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, saw firsthand the devastating outcomes for patients and staff. “I flip flop on whether or not the system can be reformed,” he said. “There is a feeling we are not going back until we get what we want.”

Another nurse drew a direct line to broader social issues, expressing outrage at cuts to food stamp (SNAP) benefits and the erosion of laws guaranteeing emergency care. She warned, “You are going to have dead bodies piling up in the street. The hospitals are shaking in their boots over the cuts to healthcare. We are already in deep trouble.”

Throughout the strike, the Teamsters leadership has refused to broaden the struggle or mobilize the full power of the workforce to defeat Henry Ford’s offensive. While Teamsters Local 332 President Dan Glass has made public statements condemning management’s “illegal” imposition of contract terms and denouncing their “anti-union stance,” the union apparatus has not called for an expansion of the strike, for mass actions by other sections of the working class including patients, or for active outreach to other sections of health care workers.

From the beginning, the Teamsters bureaucracy has limited its actions to press releases, isolated statements

to the media and a stunt rally on the picket line featuring Teamsters International President Sean O'Brien that has left workers on their own while the hospital has escalated its strikebreaking campaign.

One nurse interviewed on Thursday said: "I am almost 60 and I am a good nurse. I can run circles around you, but it is impossible to care for patients, with the existing staffing ratios. ... Centers for Medicaid are requiring rules on safe patient staffing ratios, which is what we are fighting for."

The strike is at a crucial juncture. Either the struggle is expanded into a broader fight uniting healthcare workers across Michigan and the US, or the strike will be defeated. The bankrupt strategy of the Teamsters has been to deliberately demoralize workers. Strikers have observed a reduction in the number of pickets since the early days of the action.

Nevertheless, there is a strong sentiment among rank-and-file workers for determined resistance, along with growing frustration with the lack of a fighting program or strategy from the union.

The WSWs calls for the immediate formation of a rank-and-file committee at Henry Ford Genesys Hospital.

Only such an independent body, democratically controlled by the strikers themselves, can chart a course toward victory by taking the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the Teamsters bureaucracy and linking the fight to a broader movement of healthcare workers, support staff and other workers in the Grand Blanc-Flint area.

A rank-and-file committee would fight for:

- Enforcement and improvement of safe nurse-to-patient ratios and the restoration of workplace protections.
- An immediate halt to all strikebreaking measures, including the hiring of scabs.
- Mobilization of support from hospital workers in other departments, as well as the healthcare industry and wider working class throughout the region.
- Appeals to workers facing similar attacks on staffing, compensation and patient care nationwide.

The future of patient safety and working conditions at Henry Ford Genesys Hospital requires a struggle against the control of healthcare by giant hospital chains, insurance conglomerates and pharmaceutical monopolies. The struggle for mandatory staffing

ratios—where the well-being of patients and nurses alike is the priority—requires a socialist political program aimed at removing capitalist and financial interests from the healthcare industry.

As the strike continues into its third month, the determination of the workforce in Grand Blanc demonstrates the potential strength of the broader working class—provided it takes up the fight for its own interests, independent of the bureaucracies that seek to contain and betray every genuine struggle.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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