Teamsters shut down Genesys nurses' strike after isolating it for more than a year

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After being isolated by the Teamsters union on the picket line for 411 days, the nearly 700 nurses and case workers of Henry Ford Genesys Hospital, in Grand Blanc, Michigan, outside the industrial city of Flint, have "ratified," under duress, a contract that leaves in place the very conditions they walked out to change. The staffing ratios from the previous contract remain — the contract under which the nurses struck, because Henry Ford refused to honor it.

The walkout began September 1, 2025, after the contract expired in June and negotiations deadlocked over staffing and pay. The nurses struck against conditions in which they were routinely assigned more patients than they could safely care for, forced into exhausting overtime, and left without adequate support. One medical-surgical nurse told the World Socialist Web Site that understaffing forced her to choose between holding the hand of a dying patient and passing pain medication. "We all have a lot of shame and guilt from not being able to take care of people properly," she said.

Henry Ford Health — the 13-hospital, $12 billion system that took over Genesys in October 2024 — answered with an aggressive campaign of strikebreaking. It kept the hospital running with contract nurses paid more than $100 an hour, recruited permanent replacements, and publicly praised the scabs. In November 2025 it declared an impasse and imposed its terms unilaterally. In December it threatened to permanently replace the strikers. It used court injunctions to strip the picket line of tents, chairs and burn barrels through the winter. When a mass shooting struck a church two miles from the hospital, striking ER nurses ran back to help treat the victims — and were ordered by administrators to "get out."

The hospital that left them in the cold, eager to replace them, is now supposed to be trusted to respect a contract it never respected before. The 13 percent wage increase over three years is roughly what Henry Ford would have handed out as a cost-of-living adjustment anyway, union or no union. It is also unclear from the available details whether nurses will be guaranteed their original jobs, one of the main reasons they held the line for months.

The vote totals tell the story. The contract passed 230 to 165 — a 58.2 percent turnout, with only about a third of the total bargaining unit casting a ballot in favor.

On Facebook, one nurse wrote, "I voted no also, what was the point of taking all the concessions and getting nothing for what we walked out for? I'm deeply sad at the result, but I've moved on. I took a position elsewhere. Henry Ford doesn't deserve me or any of us that stood up for what we believed in for our patients in the community."

Another wrote, "At this point, I don't even know if I'll have a position to return to in the ER at Genesys, and I remain very much undecided about whether I will return at all. After more than a year of standing together, sacrificing, and fighting for something we believed in, we have once again 'settled' on a contract. And for that, I am deeply disappointed."

A third put it plainly, "The hospital did not agree to implement any consequences for understaffing the hospital / forcing nurses to care for many patients at once."

Genesys nurses held the line for 411 days, stayed out through a winter of court injunctions, scab labor and threats of permanent replacement. While the strikers did not lack courage, they were isolated and betrayed by the Teamsters bureaucracy.

Through all of this, the Teamsters did nothing to broaden the fight. Teamsters President Sean O'Brien and General Secretary-Treasurer Fred Zuckerman visited the picket line in October 2025 — but their purpose was to prepare the isolation and eventual shutdown of the strike, not to win it.

O'Brien, who in 2023 blocked a strike by 340,000 UPS

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workers and pushed through a contract that opened the way for tens of thousands of job cuts, who helped block the rail strike under Biden, and who spoke at the Republican National Convention, offered no strategy. The union substituted controlled demonstrations for industrial action: a rally in Lansing built around the Democratic Party's long-dead Safe Patient Care Act, and an "informational picket" in Detroit that mobilized 800 members while stopping nothing.

The Teamsters deliberately kept the Genesys strike isolated from the struggle of the Corewell Health nurses. Ten thousand registered nurses at Corewell, members of Teamsters Local 2024, voted by 90 percent in March 2026 to authorize a strike over the same issues. Corewell Hospitals are located across the state of Michigan. Corewell Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak is less than fifty miles away from Henry Ford Genesys.

Though a strike against Corewell would have greatly strengthened the position of Genesys nurses, the Teamsters never called one. The eventual contract included a no-strike clause prohibiting sympathy strikes, and a "joint staffing committee" explicitly barred from requiring the addition of a single nurse and immune to the grievance procedure.

Even within Genesys itself, the strike was kept separate from the rest of the workforce: a separate technical unit ratified its own contract in June 2026 and kept working, while Henry Ford concluded eight separate union contracts during the strike.

This is the record of the trade union bureaucracy. Its function is not to fight the corporations but to police the working class on their behalf — to absorb workers' anger, channel it into dead ends, and deliver them back to work on management's terms. That is what has just happened at Genesys.

Many Genesys nurses are now signing a petition backed by right-wing forces to decertify the Teamsters. That is a measure of how completely the nurses have lost confidence in the union. But decertification is a diversion that would leave the essential question untouched.

That question is the construction of a leadership and an organization they genuinely control. The opposition now welling up among the nurses must be channeled into building organizational structures that belong to the nurses themselves.

That is why the World Socialist Web Site has called, from the first weeks of the strike, for the building of a rank-and-file committee — elected by and accountable to the workers themselves, independent of the Teamsters bureaucracy. Such a committee would fight for conditions dictated by patient and staff safety, not by the profit imperative: enforceable ratios, an end to mandatory overtime, and wages capable of retaining experienced nurses.

It would link the Genesys fight to the struggles of healthcare workers at Corewell, Michigan Medicine, Kaiser, New York and Boston, and to autoworkers and other workers throughout Flint and beyond. The WSWS supports the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, and stands ready to assist.

And the nursing profession itself is under direct attack. The Trump administration has moved to designate nursing as a non-professional degree — a deliberate insult to the skill, training and sacrifice of nurses, aimed at devaluing their labor and justifying lower pay and worse conditions. This is the same administration that, during the pandemic, called healthcare workers "heroes" while refusing them protective equipment, safe staffing and hazard pay. Healthcare is being slashed to the bone, with nearly $1 trillion cut from Medicaid over the next decade, while trillions are funneled into Wall Street's speculative bubble and a military budget topping $1 trillion.

The lesson of Genesys is that the working class can only defend itself through its own independent organization — against the hospital chains, against the union apparatus that serves them, and against the parties of war and austerity. The Genesys nurses have shown the way with a year of courage and sacrifice. The nurses who come after them — at Corewell, at Michigan Medicine, across the country — must take up that fight, and win it.

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