

“This is everyone’s fight”

After rejection of contract at Allina, Minnesota nurses call for expanded struggle

By Anthony Bertolt
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After voting down a sellout contract proposal for the fourth time, 4,800 Allina nurses in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area are continuing their strike.

The Allina nurses, who have been on strike for over a month at five hospitals, voted down a contract that would exchange their health care for more expensive plans with higher out-of-pocket costs, while allowing the hospital chain to continue increasing workloads.

The vote was a rebuke to the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA), which brought back a contract that was previously rejected by nurses with the expectation that, after a month on strike and with the recent cutoff of their health care, nurses would be cowed into accepting the deal.

Immediately after the nurses voted down the contract, the MNA declared that it is ready to negotiate again with Allina, although no date has been set for the resumption of talks. Throughout the strike, the MNA and the trade unions have worked to isolate the struggle, while seeking to channel opposition behind bankrupt appeals to the corporate executives that dominated Allina’s Board of Directors.

Nurses who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* on Thursday expressed a desire to expand the struggle to nurses throughout the region and other sections of the working class facing similar attacks on wages, health care and other benefits.

A veteran nurse with over 30 years of experience spoke about the wages-only contracts signed by the MNA at other hospitals to prevent a united struggle involving the more than 10,000 nurses in the Minneapolis area. “I’ve been talking with everyone about that, why aren’t the other 6,000 out here?”

“Whatever happens here, they are definitely going to

be fighting once their contracts are up.”

Allina has taken the lead in demanding sharp cuts in health care benefits. This will be used as the basis for similar attacks on health care workers throughout the region.

When a WSWs reporter asked her about expanding the strike to other sections of workers, she agreed, “Yes, we’re out here fighting for the general right to health care, and not only health care, but good health care, which everyone should have.”

Another veteran nurse with over 20 years of experience spoke about Democratic Party politicians who have visited the picket line and have been promoted by the MNA. “These politicians come to the picket line and show their face, but in reality they will go back and do nothing in the interest of the working class.

“It’s just self-promotion for the Democratic Party, especially with elections coming up—they are only here to get our votes.”

The MNA, like its parent union the National Nurses United, is politically aligned with the Democratic Party, which no less than the Republican Party supports the attack on health care and the working class as a whole. The Obama administration’s misnamed Affordable Care Act has been a spearhead not only for shifting costs from corporations to workers, but also increasing the workload of already understaffed nurses.

During the Democratic Party primaries, the MNA supported Bernie Sanders in order to provide a cover for their alliance with the Democrats. Sanders recently visited Minneapolis in order to campaign for Hillary Clinton and said nothing about the ongoing struggle of

the nurses.

Another nurse with 15 years of experience told the WSWS, “I have been telling the younger nurses that everything they enjoy was fought for by older generations. I am really fighting for the younger workers.”

She continued, expressing concern for the conditions future nurses and workers will face: “If nobody fights, then by the time the older nurses are gone, they will hire new young nurses and pay them half or less than what we get and give them 10 patients to watch at a time.”

Another nurse with over 10 years at Allina spoke about the need for an expansion of the nurses’ strike: “It really should be the whole state on strike, not just other hospitals, but other workers too. This is everyone’s fight, because the outcome of this will affect everyone in the state.” She agreed with a WSWS reporter who suggested that the fight be expanded to workers internationally, “We need to unite.”

The defeat of the contract is a powerful statement of opposition from nurses and a determination to fight. The effort of nurses to expand their struggle to other sections of the working class comes into direct conflict with the MNA and the trade unions as a whole, which operate as instruments of corporate management and the state in isolating workers and seeking to impose a defeat.

Even before the strike began, the MNA had already accepted the main demand of the company, to replace the current health care plans with corporate-run plans. In the wake of the latest “no” vote, the union will continue its efforts to find some way to pressure or force nurses to accept concessions.

The WSWS calls on nurses to act now to form rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the MNA. An appeal to all workers to join the struggle will be met with a powerful response from workers fed up with declining wages and incessant demands for givebacks on health care, pensions and other rights.

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