

Ascension Genesys nurses must vote **NO** on sellout contract!

Katy Kinner, Esther Galen
30 May 2024

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges Ascension Genesys nurses to reject the new tentative agreement in next week's vote.

The first sign that the deal is a sellout is that it is the product of the decision by the Teamsters Local 332 officials to call off the strike by 800 nurses which was set for May 24. But the clearest sign is that the Teamsters bureaucracy is rushing through the vote before nurses have time to examine and discuss the 160-page document. In fact, nurses have not even seen the contract at all.

The year-long contract may not even last that long. As part of a new \$10.5 billion joint venture with Ascension, Henry Ford Health is set to take over the hospital as soon as July. The union is telling nurses that Henry Ford Health has promised to honor the contract, but the union has not given nurses a written agreement to that effect. At any rate, it is obvious that the decision to cancel the strike and ram through a deal in June can only be to the benefit of Henry Ford.

One worker explained: "What makes everyone mad is that we are negotiating with Ascension Healthcare Systems and Compass/Touchpoint, when Henry Ford Health Systems is supposed to be taking over possibly as soon as July 1 and completely by December."

At any rate, any contract is meaningless if management is allowed to violate it at will. Teamsters Local 332 President Dan Glass complained in a recent interview that the union accepted a freeze in healthcare and minimal pay increases in the 2020 contract in exchange for adherence to nurse-to-patient ratios. "Since that time, it's been just the opposite. The staffing has gone down by 300 or 400 RNs, and so the workload has increased. You know, the care for patients is definitely not there when an RN is working two to three patients over what the expectation is for

the unit or department they're working in, so the ratio piece is a huge issue for Teamsters Local 332 and our bargaining unit down there at Ascension Genesys."

The issue of staffing is literally a life-and-death issue for patients, whose care is jeopardized when nurses are forced to take on more work than they can handle. It also is a serious mental and physical health hazard for nurses. Recently, a nurse in Boston fell asleep in her car after a long shift and accidentally drove off the top of a parking garage. Other nurses have been driven to suicide by the stress and anxiety.

If the experience of the past four years were the opposite of what the Teamsters promised, then why should nurses believe any claims the union makes now? Even the self-serving "highlights" make clear the deal falls far below nurses' basic demands:

- There is nothing in the contract that addresses concrete staffing ratios and plans for enforcing these ratios.
- Nurses can be paid extra if staffing reaches critical levels. But this is rarely enforced and does not address patient safety and nurses' ability to provide safe care.
- There are a wide range of wage increases, ordered by years of licensure. The lowest level, at 4.24 percent, does not keep up with inflation. The highest, 39.5 percent, more makes up for years of pay lost to inflation than it represents any real pay increase. The highest possible wage for an RN with 16 years of experience is \$50 an hour, less than or on-par with offers from hospitals in the area.
- Mandatory overtime has not been eliminated. Nurses can still be forced to work a 16-hour shift even if they object.

On Facebook, Teamsters Local 332 is attempting to censor negative comments by requiring comments be approved by a moderator before being posted.

Workers who spoke to the WSWs have also referred to the ongoing cyberattack against the hospital which has shut down computer systems. While the hospital made plans to hire strikebreakers, nurses have pointed out that the newly hired nurses unfamiliar with the hospital could not provide safe care using paper charting.

Nurses have been in an extremely powerful position to strike and win their demands. AFSCME Local 3518's contract expired at the same time as the contract for the Ascension Genesys nurses. This contract covers anesthesiologist assistants, CNAs, technical support staff, building and grounds workers, and housekeeping and dietary workers.

The role of the bureaucracy, however, has been to deliberately try to break up this potential unity and isolate nurses.

When he took office at the start of 2022, new Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien claimed to be leading a new wave of reform in the union. But the bureaucracy has proven just as corrupt as before. In 2022, he collaborated with the Biden administration to help suppress a potential strike of 120,000 railroad workers. Last year, the Teamsters pushed through a sellout at UPS that allowed for massive layoffs of over 12,000 workers. O'Brien also met with Donald Trump in January, provoking outrage among rank-and-file Teamsters members.

Union bureaucrats in the healthcare sector support the for-profit healthcare system, even as it harms patients.

Ascension Healthcare ended its 2023 fiscal year on June 30 with a net loss of \$2.7 billion and an operating loss of \$3 billion. Under capitalist medicine, the "cure" for this is to be borne entirely by healthcare workers and their patients, through job cuts, stagnant wages and longer working hours. Meanwhile, the industry as a whole is aiming to slash overhead to pay off heavy debt caused by years of mergers and acquisitions.

Rank-and-file nurses need to take the initiative into their own hands and fight for a contract that wins their demands. They must build rank-and-file committees within healthcare facilities and connect with workers across all industries who face similar struggles for decent wages, benefits and working conditions.

Contact the *World Socialist Web Site* to find out more about rank-and-committees and about joining the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File

Committees (IWA-RFC).



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact