

SEP vice presidential candidate issues message to Michigan Medicine workers: “Healthcare workers must fight to take profit out of medicine”

Our reporter
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Over 7,100 Michigan Medicine hospital workers are in a contract battle to win substantial increases in pay and benefits, safe staffing levels and other improvements in working conditions. The workers include physician assistants, medical technicians, respiratory therapists, phlebotomists and patient services staff at the Ann Arbor-based healthcare system, which reported \$226.5 million in operating profits for the last fiscal year ending June 30.

Like other healthcare corporations, Michigan Medicine received hundreds of millions in federal COVID-19 relief funding and has used it, not to improve patient care and the conditions of its workers but to expand its profit-making operations. After securing \$256 million in federal funds, Michigan Medicine and its University of Michigan Health subsidiary have been “gobbling up more and more market share in the state,” including the acquisition of Lansing-based Sparrow Health with six hospitals, the construction of a new \$920 million healthcare pavilion in Ann Arbor and expansion into the Grand Rapids area.

The University of Michigan Board of Regents has resisted workers’ demands and, according to a statement from United Michigan Medicine Allied Professionals (UMMAP), has engaged in a “nine-month-long filibuster” over a new contract. Despite this, UMMAP and the other unions, United Physician Assistants of Michigan Medicine (UPAMM) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU), have not held a strike vote and have organized an impotent “Fair Compensation Request” letter-writing campaign

to the UM Board of Regents and a two-hour informational picket on July 29 involving workers who are not scheduled to work.

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US vice president, issued the following statement to Michigan Medicine workers:

I want to express my solidarity with Michigan Medicine workers, who like healthcare workers across the US and the world, are fighting for wage increases to protect their living standards against the ravages of inflation, safe staffing levels and good working conditions. While Michigan Medicine and other healthcare monopolies are making billions in profits, workers are facing impossibly high housing, education and healthcare costs and are only surviving by increasing their credit card debts.

The hospital executives hypocritically called healthcare workers “heroes” as they forced workers into COVID-infected hospitals, leading to the deaths and debilitation from Long COVID of so many of your brothers and sisters. After pocketing billions in federal COVID relief money, they have engaged in a wave of mergers and acquisitions, contracting out whole departments to private equity investors, and conducting a ruthless job- and cost-cutting campaign. This risks the health and lives of workers and patients alike, even as the pandemic rages on.

Healthcare workers have been at the forefront of the resurgence of the class struggle over the last several years, including almost of half of the 33 largest strikes in the United States in 2023. But only three healthcare strikes involving 1,000 or more workers have been called this year. That is not because the crisis has lessened. It is because the union bureaucracy is determined to prevent any strikes from interfering with its all-out campaign to elect Kamala Harris and the Democrats.

But the Democrats, no less than Trump and the Republicans, defend the for-profit healthcare system, which is responsible for the miserable conditions you and other healthcare workers confront today. This includes Obamacare, which was drafted by the insurance companies and healthcare monopolies and incentivizes hospitals to slash costs and cut staff. This has led to the burnout of healthcare workers, increased infections and preventable deaths in hospitals and the scapegoating of workers like Vanderbilt nurse Radonda Vaught for the inevitable medical errors that occur.

Safe staffing and other improvements will not come from appeals to the UM Board of Regents, a gang of corporate executives and politicians who oversaw the brutal suppression of campus protests against the US-backed genocide in Gaza. Nor will it come from the establishment of more joint labor-management staffing committees, which are subordinated to corporate profit.

It will only be won through mobilizing the strength of all Michigan Medicine workers in a common strike action and by appealing to broader sections of the working class. This means building rank-and-file committees to transfer power from the union apparatus to the workers on the hospital floor. A special warning must be made about the leaders of the American Federation of Teachers and former UAW President Bob King, who is now the executive director of UMMAP. Both have long served the interests of big business and the Democratic Party, and rank-and-file workers can place no trust in them.

Staffing problems are not an accident. They are a deliberate policy. Hospitals are run as leanly as possible to maximize profit. At the same time, the Biden administration has overseen the dismantling of any COVID-19 public health measures, even as the death toll surpasses 420 a day and more than 1.4 million Americans have perished from the virus. The Democrats and Republicans also claim there is no money for decent living standards and healthcare even as they spend \$1 trillion on war, and the healthcare giants rake in hundreds of billions.

That is why profit must be taken out of the medicine. The Socialist Equality Party calls for the establishment of a socialist healthcare system to guarantee free, high quality healthcare for all. This will only be accomplished through the development of a powerful and politically independent movement of the working class.



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