

Michigan Medicine workers outraged as SEIU cancels 1-day strike and announces tentative agreement

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With less than 12 hours before 2,700 Michigan Medicine hospital workers were scheduled to begin a one-day strike in Ann Arbor, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) announced a tentative agreement with hospital management and cancelled the planned walkout.

In a statement issued to local media, Larry Alcoff, deputy trustee of the bargaining unit for Service Employees International Union Healthcare Michigan, said, “We’re glad and relieved to have reached a tentative agreement with the university that allows workers to move forward and keep their focus on taking care of Michiganders.”

Without saying anything on what is in the tentative agreement or if it meets the demands of the workers, Alcoff added, “This state has a proud union history and this agreement with an institution like the university underscores the deep value of the workers who care for our families and neighbors.”

Michigan Medicine said the SEIU would schedule a ratification vote on the agreement “in the coming weeks.” The union has not informed the membership when a ratification vote will take place.

Michigan Medicine employees who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* on Tuesday afternoon were outraged and denounced the last-minute cancellation of the strike and the lack of any information on the tentative agreement accepted by SEIU officials.

Workers said they “smelled a rat” and that the silence from the union on the terms of the agreement indicated they were being sold out.

One SEIU member said, “We didn’t get the tentative agreement yet. They told us we’ll have a meeting soon.”

Another SEIU member told the WSWWS:

They told us to come to work and that we would hear about what’s being discussed. I was waiting to be off today for the strike. They didn’t show us what

was agreed on. They are saying they need more time since they finished late. I don’t know why. I knew something wasn’t right.

It is entirely likely that union and management are still working on the exact terms of the sellout agreement, but priority number one was to prevent a strike—even a mere one-day walkout—from starting. There is clearly concern among both management and the union apparatus that the anger among the workers is intense and the situation could rapidly spiral out of their control. Workers in the other unions at Michigan Medicine—University of Michigan Professional Nurse Council (UMPNC), Union of Michigan Medicine Allied Professionals (UMMAP), United Physician Assistants of Michigan Medicine (UPAMM), and House Officers Association (HOA)—were already expressing opposition to instructions by their union leaders to cross the SEIU picket lines and report to work.

As one nurse told the WSWWS, “I was definitely not happy about being ordered to take over their jobs and helping to break their strike.”

The SEIU has not informed the workers about the terms of the agreement even though the respiratory therapists, ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) specialists, phlebotomists, patient care technicians, inpatient unit clerks and clerical staff voted weeks ago by 98 percent to go on strike.

The SEIU had been recognized as a bargaining unit for the Michigan Medicine employees by hospital management less than a year ago. The workers have been fighting to win their first-ever contract, demanding restoration of benefits, increased wages and improved working conditions.

Under these conditions there can be no doubt that the union has secretly agreed to a sellout that betrays the workers’ demands. This must be taken as a warning by all Michigan Medicine workers, whose various unions have

deliberately kept them in the dark and isolated from one another.

That the tentative agreement is favorable to Michigan Medicine, as well as the University of Michigan, which operates the multi-billion-dollar hospital system, was indicated by the comment of David C. Miller, president of the healthcare system.

After mouthing a few words about management’s “appreciation for these incredibly valuable members of our team,” Miller told local media:

Both negotiating teams worked tirelessly to reach this agreement, embodying the core values of teamwork, collaboration, caring and integrity that set Michigan Medicine apart as a premier academic medical center.

In other words, the SEIU has worked “tirelessly” to “collaborate” with Miller and the rest of hospital management to craft a contract that protects Michigan Medicine and its plans for expansion based on the increased exploitation of the workforce.

The last-minute announcement of an agreement with the hospital and cancellation of the one-day strike comes as no surprise, given that SEIU Michigan Healthcare, which has over 16,000 healthcare worker and over 8,000 nursing home worker members in the state, has performed this exact same maneuver many times in the past.

For example, in April 2022, two months after nurses and support staff at Trinity Health Muskegon rallied and voted to authorize informational picketing to win their demands for wage increases and an end to forced overtime, the SEIU never called a picket, instead telling workers to join a petition drive requesting Democratic Party state legislators to issue statements of support for healthcare workers in Michigan.

These protest efforts, aimed at channeling workers’ demands into the dead end of support for the Democratic Party, are a specialty of the SEIU. At present, SEIU Deputy Trustee Alcott and his fellow bureaucrats in the statewide office in Detroit and the national headquarters in Washington, D.C. are preoccupied with the election campaign of Democrat Kamala Harris.

All the functionaries in the SEIU union apparatus—who are connected in innumerable ways to both the capitalist for-profit healthcare system and the Democratic Party—are working as hard as they can to make sure that strike struggles are suppressed, especially in advance of next month’s presidential election.

Under conditions of a growing rebellion among workers against the union bureaucracy, such as the present four-week strike by 33,000 machinists at Boeing, and the commitment of massive government resources to expanding wars, including the Israeli genocide in Gaza—now escalating into war against Lebanon and Iran—and the US/NATO proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, the SEIU is working hand-in-glove with the Biden-Harris administration to ensure that new struggles of the working class are suppressed.

Hospital workers, including doctors, nurses, technicians and office staff at Michigan Medicine, must draw the lessons of the betrayal of their interests by the union apparatus. An independent rank-and-file committee must be organized by hospital workers that will take the conduct of the struggle against the university healthcare system out of the hands of the union bureaucrats.

The rank-and-file committee must organize a massive rejection of the SEIU tentative contract, draw up a list of demands that meets the needs of the workers, and prepare a hospital-wide walkout that unifies all workers. The fight begins with what workers need and not what the hospital says it can afford. The subordination of the livelihood and well-being of workers to capitalist profit and wealth creation for the billionaires must end.

Contract negotiations with the hospital must be conducted by a bargaining committee made up of the most trusted rank-and-file workers, who report publicly all details of discussions with Michigan Medicine management.

Finally, the rank-and-file committee must unite hospital workers with workers across the US and internationally, as well as in other industries—such as auto, information technology, transportation, logistics and education—in a common struggle against capitalism and for a workers’ government and socialist policies.



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