

Michigan Medicine strike called off with “memorandum of understanding”

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Late Monday afternoon, approximately 15 hours before 4,500 technicians at the University of Michigan healthcare system in Ann Arbor, Michigan, were scheduled to begin a one-day walkout, union officials at the United Michigan Medicine Allied Professionals (UMMAP) canceled the strike.

The radiological professionals, physical therapists, lab and medical assistants, rehab and social workers, diagnostic and other clinical technicians at Michigan Medicine have been fighting for their first-ever contract since February. The skilled workers are demanding increased wages and improved benefits and working conditions in the face of intransigence and contempt from the hospital administration.

In calling off the strike, the union bureaucrats at UMMAP said they had reached a “memorandum of understanding” with Michigan Medicine that creates a “framework” for contract negotiations. The union did not say if any of the workers’ demands had been met or even say a tentative agreement with the hospital administration had been reached.

Instead UMMAP officials posted on Twitter/X at 9:00 p.m. that they were relieved that the one-day strike, which would have shut down most of Michigan Medicine’s operations, had been prevented. The UMMAP wrote, “The strike set for 11/12 has been averted!” and they went on to claim that the bargaining team has “finally seen movement from HR on economic proposals.” No specifics as to the claimed progress were provided.

The real posture of UMMAP toward the Michigan Medicine administration was spelled out by local President Penni Toney, who issued a statement to the media Monday in which she said, “The UMMAP bargaining team is committed to working collaboratively with the U-M Health team to ensure

that a fair and equitable collective bargaining agreement is reached.” In other words, UMMAP is preparing to sign a rotten agreement with Michigan Medicine, and the one-day strike would have disrupted this plan.

The despicable decision by UMMAP bureaucracy to call off the walkout at the last minute follows a pattern established by unions at Michigan Medicine which have used overwhelming strike authorization votes to allow the rank and file to blow off steam before betraying workers’ demands and signing deals that give the hospital everything it wants.

This is precisely what happened in the summer and fall of 2022 when the University of Michigan Professional Nurse Council (UMPNC) obtained a 96 percent strike authorization vote from 6,000 nurses. The nurses were ready to walk out to win their demands for wage increases and an end to understaffing, when the UMPNC brought Democratic Party politicians and AFL-CIO officials to speak at a rally and informational picket where they told the nurses, “We’ve got your back.”

Shortly thereafter, UMPNC officials told workers that to go on strike was illegal, no strike occurred, and a tentative agreement was rammed through which addressed none of the nurses’ demands. Today, the understaffing issues among nurses at Michigan Medicine are worse than ever.

In October, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) at Michigan Medicine—which covers 2,700 respiratory therapists, ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) specialists, phlebotomists, patient care technicians, inpatient unit clerks and clerical staff at the hospital—received a 98 percent strike authorization vote from the membership. These workers, some of whom were earning wages less than

\$16 per hour, were also fighting for their first-ever contract with the hospital.

After informational pickets were organized, the SEIU leadership set a date for a one-day strike on October 15. At the eleventh hour the night before, SEIU officials announced that a tentative agreement had been reached. However, not a single thing was said about what was in the agreement, and instead, workers were told they would find out about the contract during meetings “in the coming weeks.”

Once again, the contract signed off by the SEIU was a sellout that did not address the demands of workers for wage increases and the restoration of benefits taken away by Michigan Medicine during the pandemic. The same exact scheme is now underway for UMMAP workers.

None of these experiences comes as a surprise given the long history of betrayals of workers’ struggles by the union apparatus. The bureaucracy functions as a key instrument of the employers and the government to suppress the class struggle and block workers from carrying out the kind of fight that is required to win back decades of attacks on their livelihoods, benefits and working conditions.

Unions such as UMMAP, which is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), have deep connections to the Democratic Party from the Biden administration, to Michigan Governor Whitmer and the University of Michigan Board of Regents.

The leadership of the AFT, all the way up to its President Randi Weingarten, staunchly defends the capitalist profit system that stands behind the exploitation of workers in the healthcare industry. The AFT bureaucracy is also a supporter of the war program of the Democratic Party that has committed untold billions of dollars to the Israeli genocide in Gaza and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

In fact, the opposition of the UMMAP union leadership to any strike action against the hospital was demonstrated prior to the sellout of the SEIU struggle in October. After claiming they supported the SEIU workers’ struggle, the UMMAP officials told its members to report to work on October 15 and effectively scab on their coworkers.

Meanwhile, UMMAP members have told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the union is blaming the cancellation of the one-day strike on other employees at

Michigan Medicine who were similarly told by their unions to report to work on November 12. This type of fracturing of the workforce is precisely what Michigan Medicine had in mind when the hospital administration recognized the different and competing unions as bargaining agents for workers in the first place.

Hospital workers must recognize that the only way to win their demands and take forward the fight against Michigan Medicine is by unifying the entire workforce in a common struggle. Rank-and-file committees must be formed to take the conduct of this fight out of the hands of the pro-capitalist union apparatus at every level. The rank-and-file committees must also reach out to other sections of the working class in the US and internationally in healthcare, auto, transportation, retail and aerospace industries to unite in a common fight against the profit system.

Meanwhile, the 30,000-strong Michigan Medicine workforce needs to make an appeal to the rest of the University of Michigan community, including faculty, staff and students, to support their struggle for the right to a good standard of living and a healthy work-life balance.

The struggle against the for-profit corporate healthcare interests that dominate the University of Michigan Board of Regents—which are behind the multi-billion dollar expansion of Michigan Medicine through acquisitions and construction of new facilities—is directly connected with the protests by students against the collaboration of the university and the US government with the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The rank-and-file committees of Michigan Medicine workers need to defend the students who are being victimized and, in some cases, criminally prosecuted for expressing political opposition to US-Israeli war crimes in Gaza.

To join the movement for rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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