

# Vote ‘NO’ at Providence! Organize the rank and file for the next stage of the fight against healthcare executives and the ONA bureaucracy!

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**8 February 2025(updated 8 February 2025, 4:23 PM)**

*We invite medical workers at Providence and across the country to write to us about the conditions they face as a result of the ongoing social crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the emerging threats on public health by the Trump administration.*

## **UPDATE: February 8**

*The ONA announced Friday evening that the contract was rejected by 83 percent, with 92 percent of nurses voting. The contract was voted down at all seven hospitals, including Providence St. Vincent, Providence Portland, Providence Milwaukie, Providence Willamette Falls, Providence Newberg, Providence Hood River, and Providence Seaside.*

*The 5 to 1 rejection of the contract represents a sharp rebuke to Providence, which has attempted to string workers along with wages and working conditions well below what they could earn elsewhere. It is also a rebuke to the union bureaucrats who brought the agreement, which is essentially the same as the one that was presented to the rank and file before the strike, to a vote in the first place.*

*Nurses are also placing themselves in opposition to the Trump administration. The attacks on immigrants and public health directly target nurses, all of whom are sworn to care for anyone, regardless of citizenship status. Trump’s attempts to destroy public health will only worsen the ongoing problems of working conditions and safe-staffing faced by frontline healthcare workers.*

*The vote makes clear the need for nurses to establish rank-and-file committees to establish democratic control of the strike. To carry their fight forward, they must break through the straitjacket of the union apparatus and the entire political establishment. They must turn outward to their class brothers and sisters in the broader working class to forge a unified fight for public health and to defend democratic rights.*

The World Socialist Web Site calls on nurses, physicians and other healthcare workers at Providence hospitals in Oregon to reject the sellout contract supported by the Oregon Nurses Association bureaucrats. We urge workers to build rank-and-

file committees to fight for the broadest possible “no” vote and fight to organize workers to prepare for a real struggle to win their demands.

The ONA announced the tentative agreement (TA) Tuesday evening, just a few days after announcing a separate deal for nurses, physicians and midwives at the six Providence Women’s Clinics across the state. At the time, the union bureaucracy proclaimed, “Our members have made significant sacrifices to stand up for fair wages, safe staffing, and the ability to provide quality care to their patients,” all of which amounted to “major wins.”

In reality, the agreement did nothing to alleviate the enormous increase in the cost of housing and basic goods, particular for those on the low of the pay scale. Nor did it provide for critical demands of the rank and file such as retroactive pay, necessary for workers who had been without a contract for 15 months.

The ONA has not commented on the current TA, stating it is waiting until the conclusion of the snap vote, which ends Friday. Comments from nurses on social media, however, make clear that what has been presented to the membership is essentially the same agreement that Providence tried to force through before the strike, including no increased paid time off, no changes to healthcare coverage or premiums, no retroactive pay and no change to contract expiration dates to keep contracts for each hospital expiring at different times.

One worker noted, “The TAs are disgusting and did not address most of staff’s asks. Voting NO to ratifying is the only way we will see any change. Very, very disappointing.”

Another made clear the importance of retroactive pay, “The TAs are pathetic. Without retro, Providence has stolen more than \$10,000 from every nurse in their employ since these contracts have expired.”

The fact that a strike was even called in the first place speaks to the immense determination among nurses to secure what is rightfully theirs. They speak for the hundreds of thousands of

other healthcare workers in the United States and the millions of workers more generally, all of whom face the same crushing stagnation of wages and living conditions as corporate executives continue to rake in tens of millions in salaries, bonuses and stock options.

And workers are facing the imminent threat of even more price hikes as a result of Trump's trade war measures against Canada, Mexico and China, as well as threats against the US's erstwhile imperialist "allies" in the European Union. Even with the "pause" of tariffs against Canada and Mexico, prices of staples such as eggs have already begun to climb.

The four-week-long walkout remains the largest ongoing strike in the United States. It straddled the last days of the Biden administration and the first weeks of Trump's second term, during which protests have erupted across the country against Trump's attacks on immigrants and moves by Elon Musk to dismantle whole government departments and seize control of the US Treasury. The contract vote takes place as the notorious anti-vaccine hack Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is about to be confirmed for the post of Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Trump's ongoing assault against public health, democratic rights and the entire working class is thus transforming every emerging struggle, including those of Oregon nurses, into a political fight with the entire Trump administration and the oligarchy it represents.

The strike is happening amid an upswing of other struggles of healthcare workers across the US. Six hundred nurses at University Medical Center in New Orleans walked out yesterday; the contract for 25,000 Connecticut healthcare workers expires March 15; 57,000 at Kaiser Permanente in California may strike when their contract expires on September 30, just to name a few.

For these fights to achieve true victory, they must be united. And to do so, Providence nurses must form rank-and-file committees, democratically elected bodies of, by and for the workers to enforce their demands, not those of the corporate executives, trade union bureaucrats or capitalist politicians.

These bodies, drawn from rank-and-file healthcare workers on the hospital and clinic floors, must take decision-making power into their own hands. Above all, this means linking up with other such committees that have been formed around the world under the umbrella of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

The strength of healthcare workers must be mobilized not just at Providence, but also at PeaceHealth, Kaiser Permanente and other hospital networks in the region and nationally. That so many struggles among healthcare workers have broken out in the past several years speaks to the fact that nurses are at the forefront of attacks against the living standards and democratic rights of the working class and the underlying fight against the capitalist system.

Such actions requires a fight against the ONA bureaucracy,

which has done nothing but undermine nurse's strength in these fights. It did not call for united industrial action when contracts began expiring, it has allowed contract expirations to vary among hospitals to keep different bodies of nurses isolated from each other, and in the current strike negotiated separate contracts for different sections of healthcare workers.

It is telling that even if the current contract is approved, hospitalists at Providence St. Vincent will still be on strike and in an enormously weaker position to fight without their brothers and sisters at the other seven hospitals also on the picket lines.

Nor has the ONA raised any objection to statements from the Department of Homeland Security that schools, churches and hospitals are now legitimate targets for immigration raids and other police state operations. And at the national level, National Nurses United has only given provided a token objection, calling on the fascist Trump to keep hospitals "safe for all people."

Whatever left-sounding rhetoric put forth by the unions, their real political orientation is to the Democratic Party, itself oriented to Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus. Moreover, the Democrats not only did nothing to prevent the rise of the Trump presidency, either in his first or second term, but have instead rolled out the red carpet for his openly fascist and anti-working class policies.

The Pacific Northwest is home to millions of workers, many of whom are immigrants and hundreds of thousands who work in healthcare. Their common class interests were demonstrated in the recent Boeing strike, when American, Hispanic, Asian and European workers all stood shoulder to shoulder on the picket line in a collective fight.

The same character of struggle must begin at Providence. A "no" vote is only the beginning. We urge all striking workers to join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and transform their fight into a broader struggle by the whole working class to defend democratic rights and to purge society of its underlying disease, capitalism.



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