

# HEALTH NETWORK

THE VOICE OF HEALTH CARE WORKERS IN THE TWIN CITIES

DEC 1980

EXTRA

## Local 113 LPN's Win Contract



By Health Network Staff

As in related labor conflicts throughout the country, management recently made eleventh-hour concessions to Local 113 LPN's. The hospitals opted for compromise in order to avert the first nursing strike in Twin Cities history. The LPN's had prepared for the strike with broad rank-and-file organizing. They also received the support of other nurses and delivery truck drivers. This forced management to respect their demands.

With the new contract the LPN's have won back some of the income they'd lost to inflation. But more importantly, the LPN's have won effective representation through a grievance procedure and through being included in any rewriting of their job description.

As a result, Twin Cities LPN's deserve the acknowledgement of their

fellow health-care workers. Twice this year they have organized a large-scale rank-and-file campaign and achieved positive results.

Last spring LPN's from all over the Twin Cities organized to replace the pro-management Minnesota LPN Association with a representative union. This victory was the result of an intensive campaign by rank-and-file nurses who were tired of being walked on. The significance of this campaign was that it mobilized passive, disorganized nurses into a united force determined to stand up for their rights.

The organizational strength of the LPN's was again manifested in their strike preparations. Nurses with little union experience took active roles in organizing picket teams. Those who understood the issue took time to explain the need for a strike to others. In this manner the LPN's organized into a united force to be reckoned with.

By forcing management to take their demands seriously, Twin Cities' LPN's have advanced the interests of everyone who works for the health-care industry. They have also provided RN's and other health-care workers with a practical example of the fundamental lesson of the labor movement: Unified action is the winning strategy.

# "It's just the beginning..."

12/10/80--Interview with "Ann" and "Laurie", two LPN's who work in a Minneapolis hospital--who prefer to remain anonymous.

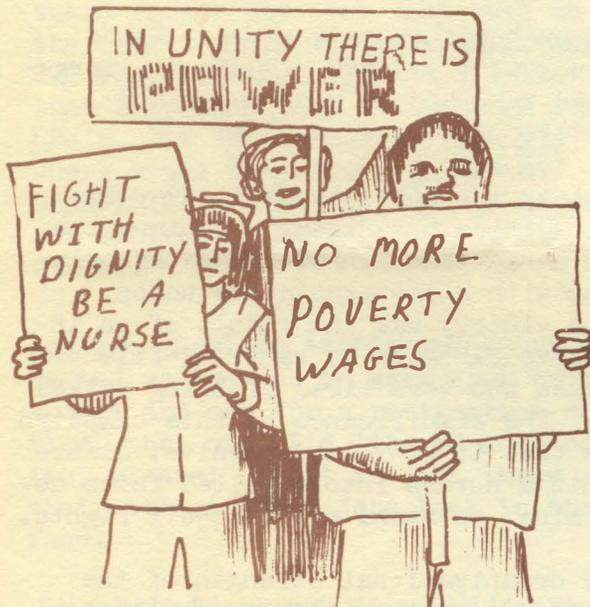
Health Network: Please describe your role in the strike preparations?

Ann & Laurie: We were co-strike captains.

Health Network: What did the LPN's gain in the new contract?

Ann: A little bit more pay.

Laurie: We're way behind. We're now getting what we should've gotten two years ago. This isn't much improvement. Compared to our old contract it looks good but compared to the RN's it is still missing a substantial amount.



Health Network: Going back to last spring before the union was voted in, why did the LPN's in your hospital organize?

Ann & Laurie: Money!

Laurie: And benefits and working conditions.

Ann: We had gotten no help from the MLPNA (Minn. Licensed Practical Nurses Association).

Laurie: They would accept whatever the hospitals would offer them.

HNW: How did the union speak to these issues?

Laurie: At the first ratification meeting they told us the hospitals' contract offer was a "sweetheart contract", the kind MLPNA would always accept. They told us to vote it down and that we could get more.

Ann: We've accepted whatever the management has offered for so long the union told us that the management thinks LPN's are a joke. "They'll take whatever we give 'em," was management's attitude.

Laurie: The union told us about one incident. Union negotiators brought up the question of LPN's orienting RN's to a station. Management replied, "LPN's orienting RN's? What do they orient them to--the bathroom?"

Ann: Another problem was that there is no LPN job description. Every hospital has a different role for LPN's. Some LPN's are doing a lot more and aren't getting paid for it. Some hospitals just use them as a cheap replacement for RN's. So the union said now is the time to voice your opinion and vote no.

Laurie: They said it was now or never. That we had to act now or accept things at least for another two years. And that with the present nursing shortage we were in a good position.

HNW: What was it that caused management to give in at the end?

Ann: Management realized that we weren't going to put up with any crap. They negotiated 17 or 18 times, right up till Saturday night.

Laurie: At our hospital we are one-third of the nursing staff. They could've skimmed by on days but no way on nights. Also the LPN's from the clinics were going to walk the picket lines with us. And pool-LPN's were going to support us. The RN's were going to refuse to work any overtime.

HNW: Were the LPN's ready to support a strike?

Ann & Laurie: Oh boy!



HNW: Were they united?

Laurie: Well, only four of them were against the strike. But we were wholeheartedly behind it. We were so fired up. There were some girls who were pregnant, two or three weeks due, and they were going to walk the lines! The night-LPN's were all going to walk out at 6 a.m. Ann was going to walk through the hospital and have them all walk out with her. The rest of us had organized to meet them with signs outside. And give them a big cheer as they walked out!

Ann: Laurie got it all organized! She got people organized into groups, and each one had a picket captain. And people were making signs. We were all ready!

HNW: How effective would the strike have been?

Ann: We had the support of the truck-drivers. If any Teamster saw a picket sign he wouldn't deliver anything to the hospital. They had contracted with the ambulances to supply them. So we planned 24-hour coverage for the first week. North Memorial, Fairview and St. Mary's were sending patients home and only accepting emergency cases; they were canceling all elective surgeries.

Laurie: Here they'd scheduled very heavy the week before. On one day they had 33 surgeries. The average is 12 to 15 per day. There had to be a connection because we looked on the schedule of the first day of the strike and there were only two or three cases scheduled.

Ann: On Friday (two days before the deadline) I saw much bigger trucks than usual delivering to the hospital.  
Laurie: One of the girls in dietary said, "I've never seen the place so overstocked!"

HNW: The management retreated in the face of the strike threat. What does this fact say about the potential power of health-care workers to demand their needs be addressed?

Ann: They realize we are an important member of the health-care team.

Laurie: LPN's wages were at the poverty level. A full-time LPN with kids was eligible for food stamps if she was the head of her family.

Morale at the hospital was at its lowest ebb. We got so worked up. I've never been so mad.

Ann: A tactic the management used to scare people was that they told us they had a right to hire replacements. But they had also said in a letter that they still had 15 openings for LPN's. If they couldn't hire 15, where would they find another 44? We used this to win over the new grads and others who weren't sure about the strike.

Laurie: Another tactic the union suggested we use was to walk down to personnel and ask for a resignation notice, then say "I'd like 44 more copies, please!" That is just throw their threat about jobs back in their face.

**Elizabeth Blackwell Women's Health Center**  
P.O. Box 8674  
Minneapolis, Mn. 55408

Ann: One thing the union lacked though. It left us on our own. We weren't kept up on the developments. Laurie went to one meeting for the strike but they didn't teach us the rules and regulations of this.

HNW: What did you learn from the strike? About unions? About the need for rank-and-file workers to be involved?

Ann: We still have a long way to go, but we put our foot down! So they know we are a serious part of the nursing team.

They knew we were ready to strike-- and they have to listen.

Laurie: I don't want to be quoted that I support this contract.

Ann: Me neither!

Laurie: I didn't vote to ratify it. But the union felt that this was all we could get at this time. But now the hospitals have to take us seriously. I'm still ready to strike any day!

About the need for rank-and-file workers to be involved. We have to be involved to show that we care, to show our support. We got to show them we won't be walked on any more. We can be strong. We showed them that we are strong.

HNW: This is the first step in a long fight.

Ann: That's right! It's just the beginning. Next time we'll be more organized and even stronger!

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U. S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Minneapolis, Minn.  
Permit No. 2938