

RNs Confront Hospital Industry on



IN AUGUST, hospital executives got a taste of what to expect if they try to deny registered nurses their right to belong to a union.

Hundreds of RNs with CNA/NNOC's growing national network of activists staged a rowdy protest Aug. 8 in downtown Chicago, even stopping midday traffic, to focus attention on the hospital industry's support of an expected federal ruling that would jeopardize RNs' rights to union protections and to be patient advocates by reclassifying them as supervisors.

Demonstrators converged at the national headquarters of the American Hospital Association to challenge its position that the National Labor Relations Board should designate nurses and lead workers in other industries as supervisors and therefore ineligible for union representation. The expected ruling, which could affect hundreds of thousands of RNs and up to eight million workers by some estimates, is known as the "Kentucky River" decision because it answers questions left open by a U.S. Supreme Court case of that name. The nurse-related cases originated from anti-union campaigns run by hospitals attempting to block organizing drives.



Above: CNA/NNOC board members and hundreds of other RNs march from Chicago's Daley Plaza to American Hospital Association headquarters. **Right:** Jan Rodolfo, RN explains to media why nurses are upset with hospital industry representatives.

Anticipating a decision unfavorable to RNs from the anti-union board, CNA/NNOC is mobilizing nurses around the country and escalating efforts to pressure hospitals not to recognize any ruling that undermines RN rights.

"The American Hospital Association is behind this drive to strip us nurses of our right to advocate for our patients and we are here to let them know we will fight them on this like we fought them when they tried to take away our ratios!" said Deborah Burger, RN and CNA/NNOC president, during a speech to demonstrators gathered in Chicago's Daley Plaza. She echoed a sentiment many nurses in the crowd shared.

Martese Chism, an RN with CNA/NNOC's Cook County Bureau of Health Services bargaining unit told her nurse colleagues to "put our feet down against the Bush administration, the Labor Board, the Hospital Associa-



tion and anyone else who would block our ability to fight for our patients."

Chanting "Super nurses, yes! Supervisors, no!," the group then marched at lunch hour through Chicago's congested downtown to the American Hospital Association's offices, where nurse leaders were prepared to risk arrest in order to discuss AHA's position with representatives. But despite trying front and back doors, the nurses found the Association's corporate tower locked to them.

To show how far they'll go to protect their patients, this group of nurse leaders, dubbed the "Chicago 25" (see sidebar), next staged an impromptu sit-down on Franklin Avenue. As the rest of the demonstrators flooded in to support the protestors, chanting "AHA, shame on you" and "Patients, not profits,"

ABOVE LEFT AND OPPOSITE: LOREN SANTOW

Supervisor Issue in Chicago

Chicago police had no choice but to shut down traffic. Dozens of downtown workers, out on their lunch breaks, looked on in amazement at the unfolding spectacle.

“It was a dramatic moment when all 300 nurses moved into the street and began chanting,” said Jan Rodolfo, an RN from Oak-

land and CNA/NNOC board member who participated in the sit-down.

After a tense half-hour stand-off, it became clear that the police would not arrest the protestors and, after a final “We’ll be back,” the nurses and their supporters marched off. “We made our point,” said CNA/NNOC Executive

Director Rose Ann DeMoro, and vowed that, “We are going to escalate.”

The Chicago rally came in the wake of a series of July 11 protests outside federal buildings nationwide by CNA/NNOC and other unions and labor groups, such as the AFL-CIO. —FRANK BORGERS

THIS IS ABOUT PATIENT CARE

AS THEY LEARNED MORE about the imminent Kentucky River decision, CNA/NNOC nurse leaders knew they wanted to show employer hospitals that nurses were prepared to up the ante in order to hold onto their union and protect their patients. They decided to strike the industry right on its home turf: the downtown Chicago offices of the American Hospital Association. Nurses planned to confront AHA representatives about its support of reclassifying RNs, especially charge nurses, as supervisors, and were willing to risk arrest to make their point.

Eventually, 25 nurses and staff stepped forward for this difficult mission and quickly became known as “The Chicago 25.” Their assignment: Get into the AHA 28th-floor offices and ask the organization to sign a proclamation saying it would back off its position. They vowed to plant themselves in the lobby until AHA agreed to talk, or the police carted them away, whichever came first.

When the moment arrived, the group was excited but nervous. They all wore white scrub tops to distinguish them. Few of them had ever been arrested before, and the commotion of the crowd added to the tension. Sussette Nacorda, a coronary care RN from Los Angeles, hadn’t even told her husband that she might get locked up. “I knew if I told him before, he might tell me not to do it,” she explained.

On top of the chaos, TV camera crews were chasing them everywhere they went. But when they got to the AHA’s building on Franklin Avenue, they found all the doors—front, back, and sides—locked. What now?

All of a sudden, they got another idea: Block Franklin Avenue by sitting down in the middle of the street. It happened very quickly



“You know, I served my country for the right to protest, and now I’m using it.”

—KIM TAKAOKA, RN

Betty Kennedy, an RN at Stroger Hospital in Chicago. “The object was to raise awareness about this Kentucky River decision, which will probably affect all nurses. I was just dumbfounded by all the nurses who came from out of town and out of state for the protest. I was like, Yes! We’re not going to take this lying down.”

After about a 15-minute standoff, the rest of the nurses on the sidewalk couldn’t resist going to the aid of the 25 by joining them in the street. Now the police would have to arrest all of them or none of them. After much more chanting and cheering, the nurses felt they had made their point, and voluntarily left the street.

“I was pretty proud of what I did,” said Kim Takaoka, a newborn nursery RN from Southern California who sat in the street. Takaoka had only been asked that morning to be part of the 25, and it was her first act ever of civil disobedience. As a former member of the U.S. Army, she said yes right away because of her deep beliefs in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. “You know, I served my country for the right to protest, and now I’m using it. As a nurse, I’m tired of corporations controlling my work and workplace. I really want to wake up the American public.” —STAFF REPORT

THE 25

RNs Sharon Bernard, Kathleen Blandini, Sue Cannon, Cathy Davis, Donna Grant, Leslie Hawkins, Linda Herrera, Betty Kennedy, Carol Koelle, Martha Kuhl, Mary Marengo, Malinda Markowitz, Robert Marth, Criselda Masisado, Kay McVay, John Greg Miller, Sussette Nacorda, Jonna Peterson, Jan Rodolfo, Lois Sanders, Sherri Stoddard, Kim Takaoka, David Welch, with Bonnie Castillo and Diane Hirsch-Garcia as staff leaders.