

Nurses strike in New York City

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3 April 1998

Six hundred nurses represented by the New York State Nurses Association struck the Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn March 31. The contract expired December 31, 1997, but the strike was called only after hospital administrators broke off all negotiations last week, according to union spokespersons. Management was ready with a scab work force brought in from the United States Nursing Corporation, located in Denver, Colorado.

The hospital's demands include the right to transfer nurses from one medical specialty to another, a practice called floating, with only two hours training. The union is not opposing this demand, but is seeking substantially more training time for a nurse who is told to work in another department.

Management also wants to eliminate the current workweek of three 12-hour shifts and replace it with five 8-hour shifts, increasing the workweek by four hours. One nurse with over 30 years experience felt that these staffing changes would make it easier for the hospital to replace nurses with low-paid technicians.

Maimonides also wants to eliminate the nurses' health benefit plan, provided through Physician Health Services, and replace it with Oxford, a company with serious financial problems. Management also wants to eliminate their funding of the nurses' long-term disability insurance, and cut one sick day.

Maimonides is one of many private hospitals throughout the country that have taken an aggressive approach to reducing their labor costs, especially with regard to higher paid nurses. This dispute coincides with the planned layoff by April 20 of 650 workers, including 163 nurses represented by NYSNA, in New York City's public hospital system.



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