

US workers express solidarity with striking nurses in New South Wales, Australia

Our reporters**19 February 2022**

Tens of thousands of public hospital nurses went out on strike Tuesday in New South Wales (NSW), the most populous state of Australia. Like health care workers in the United States and around the world, the NSW nurses and midwives are opposing longstanding staff shortages, declining pay and intolerable working conditions, which have been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nurses and midwives took strike action—their first statewide walkout since 2013—in defiance of a ban issued by the state Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) on Monday. The IRC said a walkout would “pose a risk to public health and safety” by disrupting medical services. But it is the Australian government that has put the public at risk.

After first taking measures to slow the spread of infection, the Australian government has abandoned any effort to stop the spread of the pandemic, allowing hospitals to be overwhelmed. At the same time, the state government has rejected calls for any increases to the chronically underfunded public health system. New South Wales has fewer staffed intensive care unit (ICU) beds now than it did at the beginning of the pandemic.

All these conditions are very familiar to nurses in the United States. Since the beginning of the pandemic, at least 3,700 health care workers have died of COVID-19. The Biden administration and state governments are lifting any remaining efforts to stop the spread of infections and death. And just like in Australia, US health care workers have unions, which have gone along with decades of attacks.

The struggle by Australian nurses and other health care workers, including in Sri Lanka, has been completely blacked out by the corporate-controlled media in the US. But workers who learned about these struggles from the *World Socialist Web Site*

immediately expressed their solidarity with their sisters and brothers in Australia.

“I support the nurses strike in NSW,” said Elizabeth, a registered nurse in California. “As a nurse myself in the USA we are suffering under the same horrible working conditions because our capitalist government has decided to let the virus rip through society and overwhelm the health care system. We cannot and should not tolerate what capitalist governments are doing to the working class all across the world.

“It is our duty as nurses to stand up against injustices committed against patients and the vulnerable. We must unite with our working class brothers and sisters in all industries and away from the unions that sabotage our fight and subordinate us to the ruling class. I stand with the NSW nurses and encourage all of you to continue your fight!”

Amelia, a nurse in Kentucky, said, “I am touched by the shared safety and human rights concerns amongst my fellow nurses. Bravo to the nurses who embody compassion in action and are refusing to enable a sick system! WE are sending light and shared passion to you.”

An oil refinery worker in Galveston, Texas said, “The experience of these frontline health care workers is quite similar to that of the essential workers in the oil industry. While those in charge are safely tucked away at home, we are left working intolerable hours to cover for our coworkers who must stay home to care for loved ones with COVID or those who have become sick themselves.

“We must work under these oppressive conditions in order to provide the goods and services necessary to keep our society running; that’s what makes us essential. However, considering the millions of lives lost during this pandemic and the billions of dollars

gained by those in power, it would seem our most essential function is to keep the money flowing into the hands of the global elite at all costs.”

“I was happy to read NSW nurses are taking matters into their own hands,” a Mack Truck manufacturing worker from Pennsylvania said. “All the capitalist governments seem to do is heap platitudes on essential workers like yourselves, while continuing to exacerbate the conditions you are working under. Everyone knows how essential healthcare workers are, it's time for them to be treated as such. I will share your struggle with those I know and I fully support you all. All workers should all be out and striking with you.”



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