

In attempt to preempt strike, New York nurses union announces tentative agreements with two more hospitals

Erik Schreiber
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The New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) announced yesterday that it had reached tentative agreements in late-night negotiations with Maimonides Medical Center and Richmond University Medical Center. The union is dividing workers hospital by hospital in a race to conclude sellout deals to prevent a strike of thousands of New York City nurses.

During a press conference yesterday, NYSNA President Nancy Hagans said that the agreements include “major gains” in safe staffing and wages. But the details show otherwise. The two new tentative agreements follow the pattern established by NYSNA’s tentative agreement with New York-Presbyterian Hospital, which it announced on January 1—two days after it had issued a 10-day strike notice.

The tentative agreements provide an annual raise of 7 percent for 2023 and raises of 6 percent and 5 percent for the two subsequent years of the contract. Because US inflation had reached 7.1 percent as of November 2022, the raise for this year is in fact a cut to real wages.

Understaffing is a major grievance for New York nurses as it is for nurses around the world. A list of “highlights” of the tentative agreement with New York-Presbyterian, however, includes vague language about adding more full-time positions “over the next three years.” The nature of these positions, the number of new positions to be added and the date that they will be added were left unspecified. When a reporter asked Hagans during the press conference about what safe staffing policies the tentative agreements include, Hagans did not directly answer the question.

“If I worked at NYP, I wouldn’t vote in favor of it,” a retired nurse from Long Island, New York, wrote on

TikTok. “I don’t like the verbiage in the part about hiring more nurses and ER staffing... I would have liked to see specific numbers as far as ratios and new hires. There’s too much loosey-goosey language in it.”

Voting on the tentative agreement is underway at New York-Presbyterian and will conclude on Saturday. The vote at Maimonides begins today, and voting at Richmond University presumably will begin soon. The NYSNA bureaucracy is recommending that workers approve these substandard agreements, which do not meet nurses’ most basic demands.

The contracts for nurses at 12 New York hospitals, including the three facilities mentioned above, expired on December 31. In late December, approximately 17,000 nurses voted by more than 99 percent to authorize a strike, showing their determination to fight against overwork, inadequate pay and threatened cuts to their health benefits. By December 31, adapting to demands to strike from the membership, NYSNA had delivered 10-day strike notices to eight hospitals, where approximately 16,000 of its members work. The other hospitals that received strike notices are Montefiore, Mount Sinai Hospital, Mount Sinai Morningside and West, BronxCare and Flushing Hospital Medical Center.

“I support the NYSNA nurses,” Mohamed, a lab technician at New York-Presbyterian, told a reporting team of the *World Socialist Web Site*. “And they need more money than they’re getting—the raise we got in ’21 got eaten up by inflation.”

Other workers at New York-Presbyterian face the same understaffing as nurses do. Triana, a worker on the hospital kitchen staff, told the WSWS that when someone in her department quits or is fired, he or she is

not replaced. “People in the food service said that they don’t have enough people. It’s true,” she said. “Everybody’s crying there. They cannot do the job with the little bit of people they have.”

Jeremiah, a worker from New York-Presbyterian’s equipment center, also spoke about understaffing. “We have overloads of work, and they’re not giving other employees the overtime that we need. They’re breaking the law, basically,” he said. “We’re doing more work, but at the same pay. To me, it’s just not fair,” he added. Jeremiah contrasted his situation with that of Dr. Steven J. Corwin, the hospital’s well-paid president. Expressing his solidarity with nurses, he said, “We have to work together.”

Nurses have strong support among their coworkers, but the NYSNA bureaucracy is pulling out all the stops to draft pro-company contracts, pressure nurses into ratifying them and prevent a strike. The union bureaucracy is demonstrating that its true constituency is the hospital executives. Despite NYSNA officials’ claims, they are fighting to protect not nurses and patients, but corporate profits.

Nevertheless, NYSNA is pretending to prepare for a struggle. “We are being asked to sign up for pickets this week scheduled at the end of our shifts,” a New York health care worker, who preferred to remain anonymous, told the WSWs. “We have also heard from travel nurses that their agency is extending their contracts by at least nine more weeks to replace them if there is a strike. I don’t think there are enough travel nurses at this point for management to accomplish this.”

The NYSNA bureaucracy also held an emergency online meeting at 8 p.m. on Wednesday. Attendance exceeded Zoom capacity, which indicated the militant mood of the rank and file. According to the health care worker, there was no discussion of strike pay.

The hospitals are making their own preparations. “The hospital management called a mandatory meeting on Wednesday where they told us that benefits would be cut when we go on strike,” said the worker. “They also said they would protect our identity, and police were going to escort us into the building if we decided to continue working, which would continue our pay and benefits.” Thus, hospital management is attempting to coerce workers into becoming scabs. Moreover, management at the worker’s hospital announced late in

the day that it would not be admitting any new patients as of Thursday.

To increase the pressure on nurses, Mount Sinai Health System is diverting ambulances from Mount Sinai Hospital, Mount Sinai West, Mount Sinai Morningside and Mount Sinai Beth Israel. The system also is canceling elective surgeries, scheduling only emergency surgeries at two facilities and transferring some patients, including babies in neonatal intensive care, outside the Mount Sinai Health System.

As health care workers around the world have done, New York nurses have shown the depth of their frustration with the intolerable conditions they endure. The near-unanimous strike vote indicates their burning desire to fight, but no victory can be won if the nurses allow the NYSNA leadership to retain the initiative. Instead of waging a united fight, NYSNA is dividing nurses by workplace to reduce their power and drain their momentum. Its goal is to reach agreements favorable to the millionaire hospital executives, as the burst of tentative agreements shows.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges nurses to reject these concessionary tentative agreements. If workers are to gain wages that beat inflation and staffing ratios that enable the highest-quality care, then they must break from the treacherous NYSNA leadership. To conduct a genuine struggle, nurses at each hospital must form a rank-and-file committee that is democratically controlled by the workers themselves and entirely independent from NYSNA and the Democratic Party, to which NYSNA is closely tied. By coordinating a united fight on a national and international level, these rank-and-file committees can achieve what workers objectively need.



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