

Contract expires for 6,000 nurses at Stanford Health as Trump guts public health agencies

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The contract for 6,000 nurses at Stanford Health Care and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital in Northern California expired March 31. The Committee for the Recognition of Nursing Achievement (CRONA), the nurses' union, has kept its members on the job without a contract, despite growing demands for action over worsening conditions.

Nurses at hospitals across the country face severe understaffing, making it impossible to provide safe patient care. Many cannot afford to live in the area where they work, as the cost of living in the San Francisco Bay Area is among the highest in the country.

Local news outlet KCRA recently reported on Stanford nurses reduced to sleeping in their vans between shifts. "I personally know at least 15 people sleeping in their vehicles," one emergency nurse told the station. "But there are definitely more than that."

This situation highlights the urgent need for the working class to organize in defense of public health. However, the unions and the Democratic Party have refused to mobilize workers against these attacks.

Workers must take the initiative themselves, forming rank-and-file committees to organize mass opposition and unite workers across industries, fighting against both Trump and his enablers in the Democratic Party and the union bureaucracy. Rank-and-file committees, which are being built all over the world, allow workers to retain their maximum initiative, share information being concealed by the bureaucrats and appeal for support from other sections of the working class.

The situation is urgent. Just yesterday, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) began laying off 10,000 workers under the leadership of anti-vaccine conspiracy theorist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Scenes of long lines of federal employees waiting to find out if they still had jobs made clear the brutal impact of these policies.

The assault on health care workers escalated last Friday, when the Trump administration ripped up collective bargaining rights

for much of the federal workforce through an executive order. This includes HHS employees and workers at the Department of Veterans Affairs, which runs the country's hospital network for military veterans.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the largest federal workers' union, and the trade unions as a whole have responded with empty gestures, limiting opposition to letter-writing campaigns to Congress. It has refused to even raise the question of a strike, even though the layoffs and contract gutting constitute an existential threat to its members.

CRONA has proven no less willing to capitulate. In 2022, it sold out a strike at Stanford by forcing through a contract that resolved none of the nurses' key demands on staffing and wages. Nurses were given no time to even read the contract before it was ratified.

During that strike, the Stanford Nurses Rank-and-File Committee was formed to oppose the sellout. It called for a rejection of the contract, the resumption of the strike which CRONA had summarily called off, and the removal of the bargaining committee and its replacement with one drawn only from the rank and file.

Now, the union leadership is repeating the same pattern. It issued a complacent statement Monday night declaring, "If we do not reach an agreement by the time our contracts expire on Monday, March 31, rest assured that CRONA is prepared to continue negotiating." Meanwhile, according to CRONA, Stanford management has rejected seven out of 13 of its proposals.

There is no legitimate reason to keep nurses working without a contract. But CRONA has not even scheduled a strike vote, a flagrant violation of the long-standing principle of "no contract, no work."

The union's official demands are completely inadequate. Its proposed wage increases—totaling 25 percent spread over six years—fail to make up for the loss of real wages due to inflation. CRONA has limited workers' opposition to toothless displays like "CRONA Unity Day," where nurses were encouraged to wear union-branded shirts instead of preparing for real action.

The war on public health and Stanford's role

Stanford University, which oversees the hospitals, is deeply implicated in the broader assault on public health. Figures like Jay Bhattacharya, Trump's new head of the National Institutes of Health, and Scott Atlas, a key figure behind the Trump administration's COVID-19 policies, have held positions at Stanford.

Bhattacharya and Atlas were the driving force behind the Great Barrington Declaration, which opposed lockdowns and other measures needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. By promoting "herd immunity," these policies contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands.

Other figures installed by the Trump administration include

- Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is dismantling health-related research at HHS while promoting false claims linking vaccines to autism.
- Martin Makary, an anti-vaccine advocate, now in charge of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
- Janette Nesheiwat, a right-wing Fox News regular, as surgeon general. She opposes vaccine mandates and called Trump's promotion of hydroxychloroquine "smart."
- David A. Geier, a disgraced vaccine skeptic, assigned to find a nonexistent link between autism and vaccines.

Elite universities like Columbia University, far from defending scientific truth and free speech, have caved immediately to Trump's demands for campus crackdowns. These are not simply academic institutions, but powerful businesses with endowments worth tens of billions. Stanford, with an endowment of \$37 billion, will undoubtedly comply with whatever Trump demands of them.

This assault on health science is part of a broader campaign to destroy public programs and thousands of federal jobs. The Trump administration is blatantly ignoring laws, court rulings, and even the US Constitution to establish a dictatorship that directly serves the oligarchy. The presence of figures like Elon Musk, Trump himself, and other billionaires in and around the White House testify to the open and direct rule of the ultra-wealthy.

As far as the ruling class is concerned, the key lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic was that public health measures are an unacceptable obstacle to corporate profit. Even before Trump's return to power, Biden declared the pandemic "over" to justify ending federal COVID-19 protections. Now, Trump's government is escalating these policies to their most extreme form.

This is just the beginning. The administration is considering \$880 billion in Medicaid cuts and slashing \$230 billion from food stamps over the next decade. According to the Commonwealth Fund, these measures could eliminate more than a million jobs in health care, food services, and related industries. A failure to extend health insurance premium tax credits after December 2025 would result in an additional 286,000 jobs lost in 2026 alone.

This underscores the urgent need for a fight back by the working class. In February, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) issued a statement calling on federal workers to form independent committees to lead the struggle. The statement read:

The IWA-RFC calls on federal workers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracies, to lead this fight. Mass meetings and demonstrations should be called to prepare emergency strike action to stop the firings and the gutting of essential programs. ...

These committees will unite federal workers with immigrant workers fighting deportation, educators and healthcare workers resisting cuts, and industrial workers battling exploitation and unsafe conditions, forging a common struggle against the attacks on the entire working class.

Nurses at Stanford cannot allow the bureaucrats to torpedo another struggle! They must take matters into their own hands, organize rank-and-file committees, and impose their own democratic will.

The revival of the Stanford Nurses Rank-and-File Committee, founded during the 2022 strike is essential—not only to defend nurses but to protect public health as a whole. This fight is part of a broader movement preparing to resist corporate attacks on workers under the Trump administration. The time to act is now.



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