

“Reject the politics of compromise and subordination”: Open letter from California nurse to New Orleans nurses

Liz Cabrera
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*On Sunday, November 16, at 3:00 p.m. US Eastern Time, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the Socialist Equality Party (US) are holding an online public meeting to organize the fight against layoffs and hunger. **Register here to attend.***

The following letter is addressed to 600 nurses at the University Medical Center, who completed a three-day strike on Thursday.

As a fellow nurse from California, I reach out from nearly 2,000 miles away to express my deep solidarity and admiration for your courage during this pivotal strike. Your unwavering commitment to your patients, your colleagues and your community inspires workers everywhere, including those of us facing similar challenges on the West Coast.

At this critical moment, as you stand on the picket lines of University Medical Center, your actions resonate far beyond the walls of your hospital. You have mobilized not merely as nurses demanding fair wages and humane conditions, but as frontline workers in a movement that challenges the very foundations of exploitation and indifference that plague our society.

Nurses must draw the necessary conclusions from our shared experiences. The strategy of the union officials, limited local strikes at individual hospital systems and even individual facilities, has led nowhere. This is by design, because they function as little more than agents of management.

You voted two years ago to form a union not so a small number of officials could work out a living arrangement between themselves and LCMC Health [Louisiana Children's Medical Center], like they have in other parts of the country. You joined to defend your patients and the health of the city of New Orleans.

The path forward lies in organizing independently—through the creation of rank-and-file committees democratically controlled by nurses themselves—to wage a genuine fight for your demands.

I urge every nurse to reject the politics of compromise and subordination. Only through independent, collective action can we secure safe staffing, fair wages and the dignity we all deserve.

Here in California, nurses face similar challenges. In California, more than 65,000 University of California workers—including custodians, patient care assistants, nurses and technical staff—are preparing to strike. Their cause is just: the fight for wages that keep pace with the cost of living, the right to housing and the right to dignity.

For years, the university has lavished riches upon its highest officials, while those who sanitize wards and care for the sick are driven to the brink—priced out of their homes, forced into long commutes, and denied fair compensation. Over 13,000 have left in the past three years.

In Grand Blanc, Michigan, at Henry Ford Genesys Hospital, nearly 750 nurses and case workers have been on strike since September 1, demanding safe staffing and fair pay.

The situation everywhere is the same. Why? The healthcare system is in a state of deep decay. This is the result of deliberate policy. The shutdown used by the Trump administration was a calculated attack on the working class, slashing food stamps and vital programs while funneling billions to war and corporate interests.

During the shutdown, policies targeted 42 million Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients as part of an ongoing assault aimed at shifting the burden of capitalism's crisis onto workers and their families. Food pantries across the country saw record demand and workers forced to choose between food or medicine.

We are engaged in a political, not merely a contract fight, against capitalism itself. Despite unparalleled scientific progress, the American working class faces declining life expectancy and rising mortality. The power of the oligarchy over society has to be shattered. Only by removing the profit motive from healthcare and other social needs, through the

nationalization of the healthcare giants and other corporations and placing them under workers control, can genuine social rights be secured for all.

This movement has to be independent from all of the existing institutions, including the Democrats who have refused to fight Trump. This was proven this week by the end of the government shutdown. Eight Senate Democrats voted with Republicans, bailing out this fascist administration at the point where it is most vulnerable.

Throughout the shutdown, neither the Democratic Party nor the trade union bureaucracies proposed any collective action to end attacks on the working class.

We must organize ourselves from below, in rank-and-file committees, to retain our full initiative, unite across the country and the world and prepare mass actions in support of our common interests. Only through a network of rank-and-file committees, which is being built around the world by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, can our enormous power as the working class be brought to bear.

The union bureaucrats will never organize the mass movement that is needed because it will jeopardize their relations with the Democrats and management. The recent appearance of Julie Su on the nurses' strike line must be taken as a serious warning to every nurse. During the West Coast dockworkers' struggle, she intervened not to support the workers, but to suppress their fight in the interests of management and the state. Her presence on the picket line demonstrates the close collaboration between government officials and the union bureaucracy.

This is why, rather than mobilizing the full strength of the working class, they have limited your fight to narrow negotiations and isolated actions. They have discouraged broader solidarity and failed to challenge the system that perpetuates your exploitation.

You have now finished your fifth strike in two years. But nothing has resulted from this strategy of "pressuring" management to see reason, except that 200 nurses have left the emergency room in two years in search of better jobs elsewhere. The union apparatus has refused to mobilize its entire 225,000 membership, leaving the vast majority of nurses on the sidelines while the crisis in our hospitals deepens.

The time has come to escalate the struggle in New Orleans into part of a broad movement uniting nurses across the country in defense of public health. The unions' refusals to organize mass action and their willingness to accept endless delays in contract talks only serve to strengthen the hand of management.

But California healthcare workers want to join you in building this movement. It's important to recognize that

many UC workers represented by AFSCME Local 3299 are immigrants, facing not only low wages, difficult working conditions and capitalist exploitation, but also the constant threat of discriminatory policies targeting immigrant communities. Their struggle is inseparable from the broader fight to defend public health and democratic rights.

The California Nurses Association (CNA), the affiliate of the National Nurses United (NNU) which represents over 225,000 nurses nationwide, has joined the University of California strike in a gesture of solidarity. But the enormous social power demonstrated by this strike will amount to little if it is limited to a series of short, toothless strikes.

I call upon every nurse, worker and young person to unite in a common struggle. The defense of public health is inseparable from the defense of all social rights won by the working class. Only through collective action, independent of the union bureaucracy and the political establishment, can we transform these struggles into an unstoppable movement for genuine change.

In this spirit, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the Socialist Equality Party are holding an online public meeting on Sunday, November 16 at 3 p.m. US Eastern time. We urge every nurse and supporter to attend, participate, and help build the leadership necessary for a new, independent movement of the working class. This meeting will provide a forum to discuss the way forward, share experiences and organize the fight for safe staffing, fair wages and the defense of public health.

Let every nurse answer this call. Organize rank-and-file committees, reach out to your colleagues, and join hands with workers across industries and internationally. The fight against the capitalist system is the fight for the future of healthcare and the dignity of all working people. Join us this Sunday at the IWA-RFC meeting. Your voice and participation are essential.

In solidarity,
Liz Cabrera, RN



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