

15,000 New York City nurses poised to strike for safe staffing

Erik Schreiber
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A strike of nearly 15,000 nurses is scheduled to begin on Monday morning at four hospitals in New York City. If it proceeds as planned, the walkout will become the biggest nurses' strike in the city's history.

The private nonprofit hospitals involved are Mount Sinai Hospital, Mount Sinai Morningside and West, Montefiore Medical Center and NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital. The nurses' main demands are safe staffing, fully funded health benefits, protections against workplace violence, and raises. The nurses voted by 97 percent to strike when their contracts expired on December 31.

The four hospitals were among 12 private nonprofit hospitals in New York City where contracts with 20,000 nurses expired on December 31. Contracts for more than 1,000 nurses at three Northwell Health hospitals in Long Island, New York, expired on the same day. These circumstances created the conditions for a massive strike that would have shaken hospital administrators and inspired healthcare workers nationwide, if not internationally.

The conditions are favorable for a mass movement in defense of the social rights of the working class, including the right to high quality healthcare. The strike will meet with large support among the workers of New York City and the country, who are seething against the subordination of every aspect of life to profit by the corporate oligarchy.

But the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) is working overtime to sabotage the struggle and impose pro-management agreements, as it did last time in 2023. It already has withdrawn strike notices at 11 other hospitals without even having achieved tentative agreements.

The nurses must act immediately, independently of the union bureaucrats, to take control of the strike,

expand it to all 15 hospitals with expired contracts and use it to fight for quality public healthcare across the city and the country. This means forming a rank-and-file strike committee, composed of nurses, and excluding union officials, to impose democratic oversight of the strike and future contract talks and countermand decisions by union officials which violate the membership's will. A committee would provide the means through which workers can discuss strategy and agree on "red lines," beyond which they will not obey any back-to-work order.

Workers must appeal for maximum support from workers across the region because the Democratic Party is preparing to intervene against the strike. Governor Kathy Hochul of New York, a Democrat, issued a formal state of emergency on Friday in anticipation of the strike. To satisfy what she called the "immediate and critical need" to supplement hospital staffing, the order allows the state to relax certain workforce requirements through February 8, thereby permitting licensed healthcare workers from other states to practice in New York. The order enables these workers to be deployed across hospitals as needed. Hochul also activated the state's Surge and Flex Health Coordination System to balance patient loads among hospitals.

Hochul presented these measures as means of ensuring the continuity of patient care. But the real goal is to protect the balance sheets of the private healthcare systems. In her public remarks, she has never even pretended to support nurses' demands for safe staffing, healthcare benefits or workplace safety. Nor has she criticized hospital administrators or pressured them to come to an agreement.

Mayor Zohran Mamdani, the Democratic Socialists of America member, whose election was motivated by

deep opposition to inequality among the city's population, has maintained a conspicuous silence about the strike. NYSNA endorsed Mamdani after he won the Democratic primary last summer, fanning illusions that he would respond to nurses' and patients' needs. But Mamdani, who since his primary victory has spent months courting Wall Street and even traveling to the White House for a friendly visit with Trump, has made no public comments about the strike since his inauguration on New Year's Day.

Mamdani demonstratively supported Hochul as she was being heckled loudly during an October campaign rally. As for Trump, with whom Mamdani has held out the prospect of "partnership," he is overseeing the evisceration of federal public health agencies and drastic cuts to Medicaid that will leave nearly 12 million people without health insurance.

In just the first week of this year, Trump presided over the illegal invasion of Venezuela, the kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro (who is being held and will be tried in New York City) and the murder of unarmed US citizen Renee Nicole Good by an ICE agent in Minneapolis.

NYSNA did everything in its power to ensure that such a strike would not happen. Despite overwhelming votes in favor of a strike, the union did not issue the required 10-day strike notices until two days after the contract had expired. Having bought time, it set about negotiating behind closed doors with individual hospitals instead of uniting its members in a fight against them.

Based on supposed agreements that it has not described in detail, NYSNA began withdrawing strike notices at hospital after hospital, even though it had not finalized tentative agreements. These actions openly violate nurses' democratically expressed will to fight for better conditions.

On Saturday, NYSNA withdrew strike notices at Huntington, Plainview and Syosset hospitals on Long Island after having reached tentative agreements with Northwell Health. The agreements allegedly include safe staffing standards, 5 percent annual raises and "good" health benefits, NYSNA President Nancy Hagans said during a press conference on Sunday.

None of these claims can be taken at face value. Moreover, the 5 percent raises are a sharp reduction from the 10 percent raises that NYSNA originally

demanded. As the damage from Trump's tariffs becomes more apparent this year, these raises will largely be eaten up by inflation. And without more information about the health benefits, the nurses cannot judge for themselves whether they are "good" or not.

Nurses at Mount Sinai Hospital told reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) that they were upset that NYSNA had been withdrawing strike notices without having secured tentative agreements and without consulting workers about it in advance. They acknowledged that the union was using a divide-and-conquer strategy against them as it had done in 2023. Nurses learned through bitter experience that those contracts were not the victories for safe staffing that the union claimed they were.

That year, NYSNA bureaucrats refused to unite nurses in struggle against the same 12 New York City hospitals. Instead, it reached agreements at individual hospitals and called off the strike facility by facility. Although the union could not prevent strikes at Mount Sinai Hospital and Montefiore Medical Center, it shut them down after only three days.

This experience shows that the union bureaucracy is actively working in the interests of the hospitals and against its own members. To prevent a repeat of the 2023 betrayal, nurses throughout New York City must organize immediately and wage a strike independently of the union. To do this, the nurses must form rank-and-file committees at each facility and break out of the isolation that the union is imposing on them.

The struggle must include the holding of public meetings at which the nurses can promote their demands and denounce the bipartisan assault on public health and workers' rights. To strengthen their hand, the nurses must appeal to other healthcare workers, and workers in every industry, for support.



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