

New York strike pits nurses against the financial oligarchy

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On Thursday, some 15,000 nurses at three private nonprofit hospitals in New York City are entering the fourth day of their strike, the largest nurses strike in New York history. Their fight for safe staffing, healthcare benefits, raises that beat inflation and protection against workplace violence assumes immense importance amid the bipartisan attacks on public health and workers' rights.

The nurses' struggle pits them against the entire capitalist oligarchy that subordinates healthcare to the accumulation of profit.

The hospitals have issued bellicose threats and declared the nurses' demands "extreme" and "reckless." Mount Sinai claimed that satisfying the nurses' demands would cost it \$1.6 billion over three years. This is a fraction of the wealth of the financial oligarchy centered in Wall Street, and many members of Mount Sinai's own board of trustees could write a check for that amount.

The New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) bureaucracy has focused its statements on the seven- and even eight-figure pay packages awarded to the hospital CEOs. While these salaries are indeed obscene, of even greater significance are the multibillion-dollar fortunes amassed by the members of the boards of trustees at the hospitals that are now on strike.

The membership lists for these boards read like a "who's who" of America's ruling financial oligarchy. These individuals enjoy the most intimate connections with every section of the US capitalist ruling class, as well as with the administration of President Donald Trump and the two major big-business parties, the Democrats and Republicans.

The Mount Sinai board of trustees includes some of the wealthiest and most politically connected figures in the United States. Among them is James S. Tisch, CEO of Loews Corporation, whose family fortune is estimated at over \$10 billion. Tisch is a major Republican donor, and his daughter, Jessica Tisch, was recently reappointed as New York City police commissioner by Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) Mayor Zohran Mamdani.

Other trustees include Frank Bisignano, a Wall Street

billionaire whom Trump named Social Security commissioner after his wife donated over \$931,000 to Trump's 2024 campaign; Glenn Dubin, a billionaire hedge fund manager implicated in the Jeffrey Epstein scandal; John Hess, CEO of the oil and gas multinational that bears his name and a major advocate of fracking; Henry Kravis, the multibillionaire cofounder of private equity giant KKR and a \$1 million contributor to Trump's 2017 inauguration; Robert Rubin, former Treasury secretary and executive at Goldman Sachs and Citigroup; and Andrew M. Saul, a Republican investment banker appointed commissioner of Social Security during Trump's first term.

No less notable is the New York Presbyterian board of trustees, which includes Jerry Speyer, the billionaire real estate mogul who controls Rockefeller Center; Steven R. Swartz, president and CEO of the Hearst media conglomerate; Ray Dalio, the multibillionaire founder of the world's largest hedge fund, Bridgewater Associates; and William Lauder, chair of Estée Lauder Companies, a member of a family worth an estimated \$40 billion and a major Trump donor.

Also on New York Presbyterian's board of trustees is Stephen A. Schwarzman, the CEO and cofounder of Blackstone, the world's largest private asset manager. Blackstone manages over \$1 trillion in assets, and Schwarzman's personal wealth is estimated at over \$50 billion. He ranks among the top donors to Trump and the Republican Party.

The reaction of these billionaires to the nurses on the picket line mirrors the Trump administration's response to mass demonstrations against its anti-immigrant crackdown and other dictatorial measures. They are "extremists" who must be crushed to set an example for other sections of the working class.

The ruling class speaks through both of its political parties. New York Governor Kathy Hochul has framed the strike as a threat to patient care, warned that it could "jeopardize the lives of thousands," and declared a state of emergency across New York City that strengthens the hand of the

hospitals by allowing them to bypass licensing rules and import out-of-state staff.

Nor should nurses place any trust in the rhetoric of Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who has sought to portray himself as an ally of the strike. Mamdani said nothing about the looming confrontation in the days leading up to the walkout. When he finally appeared for a photo op on the picket lines, it was after months of cultivating ties with the city's financial elite and pledging a "partnership" with the Trump administration.

A fight against the oligarchy requires the full mobilization of the power of the working class. The New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) bureaucracy, however, is implacably opposed to such a struggle. Prior to the strike, the NYSNA worked systematically to isolate nurses, canceling walkouts at one hospital after another without even finalized agreements. It is attempting to repeat its betrayal of 2023, when the union similarly kept nurses divided and blocked the development of a unified struggle. The so-called "safe staffing" victories hailed by NYSNA two years ago proved to be empty rhetoric.

The rest of the trade union apparatus is doing nothing. On January 8, 45 unions representing over 2.5 million workers issued a letter calling for contracts to be settled before the January 12 strike deadline. "Unions are ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with nurses on the picket lines if a strike becomes necessary," the letter stated—an empty promise issued after most strikes had already been called off.

To take forward the struggle, the WSWs urges nurses to build rank-and-file strike committees—democratically elected and led by nurses themselves—to establish democratic control over the strike. Nurses should formulate their non-negotiable demands as the precondition for accepting any contract or ending the strike including:

- Genuinely enforceable safe staffing ratios levels determined by rank-and-file nurses themselves;
- The immediate reinstatement of the three Mount Sinai nurses who were falsely accused of "sabotage" and an end to all victimizations;
- Immediate restoration of health benefits regardless of contract status;
- Health coverage at no cost to healthcare workers coupled with inflation busting wage increases.

These committees must fight to expand the strike to all 15 affected hospitals, oversee all negotiations and picketing, and mobilize active resistance to any attempt to prematurely shut down the strike or send nurses back to work on the basis of empty promises.

At the same time, rank-and-file committees must link the fight for healthcare to the broader struggles of the working class.

Nurses are not alone: workers across New York—educators,

transit workers, municipal employees, and others—are confronting inflation, job cuts, and the collapse of public services. This year will see major contract battles involving over 300,000 city employees, 80,000 health care workers at the League of Voluntary Hospitals, 37,000 transit workers in TWU Local 100 and 40,000 hotel workers in the Hotel and Gaming Trades Council.

In contrast to the passivity of the union officials, workers throughout New York and beyond have expressed deep solidarity with the nurses. They understand that this is not just a contract dispute, but a broader struggle for healthcare and the rights of all workers. A genuine victory will require the active unification of these struggles into a mass movement of the working class, acting independently of the union bureaucracy and both big-business parties.

The aim must be an end to the domination of profit over health. Hospitals must be taken out of the hands of the millionaire CEOs and billionaire trustees and placed under the control of the healthcare providers and the working class as a whole. Health care must be a social right, guaranteed to all, as part of the socialist transformation of economic life on the basis of social need.

The New York nurses strike reveals the true character of American society, a country ruled by a parasitic oligarchy. But it also reveals the immense power of the working class, whose labor sustains every aspect of society. To win this struggle, nurses must take the initiative into their own hands by building rank-and-file committees, linking up with other sections of workers and turning the strike into the spearhead of a broader fight against inequality, exploitation and capitalist dictatorship.



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