

“There is power and unity”

New York nurses remain defiant as hospitals dig in

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Nurses in New York City continued their powerful strike for the ninth day on Tuesday, braving the bitter cold to staff the picket lines to demand safe staffing levels and to defend wages, retirement and health care benefits. Negotiations remain at a standstill at all three hospital systems, with no bargaining taking place since an unproductive session with Montefiore on Sunday.

On Tuesday morning, the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) held a rally outside Mount Sinai with New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani and his political mentor, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. An alliance with Democratic Party politicians, especially Mamdani and other “progressive” local politicians, has been a component of the union bureaucracy’s approach to the strike.

On the picket line Tuesday, Sanders derided the “broken and dysfunctional health care system” in the United States. “Don’t tell me you can’t provide a good nurse staff ratio,” he added, “when you’re paying your CEO at New York Presbyterian \$26 million a year.”

Mamdani remarked, “It’s not about the money. If it was, we would be talking about compensation packages. We’d be talking about the amount of money spent on travel nurses. What this is about is, in fact, is about recognizing the worth of each and every nurse in the city.”

Mamdani’s reference to spending on travel nurses is particularly notable—and duplicitous. Since taking office on January 1, the new mayor has forged a close alliance with Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul, who personally signed off on the emergency declaration that allowed travel nurses to work without a license in the state in order to help break the strike.

The Democratic Party in New York is entirely

responsible for allowing the massive strikebreaking operation by the hospitals to proceed, a fact that both Mamdani and Sanders completely cover up.

While Mamdani and Sanders attempt to score rhetorical points during their picket line visits, they propose a plan not of action but of paralysis. “I am here to say the same thing that I said on the first day of this strike, which is that we encourage everyone to return to the bargaining table,” Mamdani said. Sanders concluded his remarks with a similar appeal to hospital executives to resume the negotiations.

The wealthy hospital executives and oligarchs on the board of directors, however, are not interested in bargaining. They are out for blood. A Montefiore spokesperson continued to slander as “reckless and dangerous” nurses who have devoted their lives to caring for the sick and injured, who showed up in the depths of the pandemic, and who saw their colleagues sacrifice their lives.

Brendan Carr, the CEO of Mount Sinai Health, made clear the hospital is determined to defeat the strike. “As we settle into this long-term cadence, it will become more difficult to add Mount Sinai nurses not already working into the schedule without advance notice,” he warned.

Carr and his ilk are determined to smash the resistance of nurses and make workers pay for the massive cuts to health care enacted last year by the Trump administration, with key assistance from the Democratic Party. Their contempt for workers echoes the ravings of the president himself, who is engaged in a conspiracy to erect a dictatorship, focused at present in Minneapolis, with immigrant workers as the

immediate target.

To fight back against an irrational health care system and dangerous understaffing, nurses must reject empty appeals to representatives of the oligarchy. The real allies of nurses are the millions of workers who are also facing the consequences of a system that subordinates healthcare and other basic rights to private profit.

A strategy to win the strike requires the rank and file organizing independently to link up with and advance the developing strike movement, including the broad mobilization in Minneapolis, among nurses in California, and across the many sections of workers in New York City who are preparing for contract struggles.

Interviews from the picket line

The WSWS spoke with striking nurses at Montefiore and New York Presbyterian this week.

A New York Presbyterian nurse commented on Tuesday, “We’re up against executives who like a lot of money, and the workers who are putting in this sweat and tears to keep the profits coming. And it needs to be distributed more evenly. That’s what we’re here for. It’s not just for nurses, it’s for everybody in the country.”

“We have to keep our health insurance benefits. We have to,” she said. “Because if we get injured at work, we need workplace protection.”

Another issue the nurse stressed was the way in which AI was being used to threaten jobs and further reduce staffing levels. “They want language put into our contract to work around these ratios that are state-mandated. Instead of putting an actual human, they want to substitute a virtual person on a computer screen or a TV. We said we want to have a say in that. If you’re gonna put a person on a TV, it has to be one of us, an actual NYSNA nurse—somebody we know, we hired, somebody we approved.

“The problem is they want to put that virtual thing into our count. Say, if we have to have 10 nurses on that shift to cover that many patients, they’ll maybe put seven actual humans and three virtual things in there. That’s a workaround of the ratio. So we have to stand

up right now and say, Okay, we need to address this situation right now.”

Discussing the broader political situation, she said, “It’s a different atmosphere now with Trump. He’s invaded Minneapolis with these federal troops. Some people are calling it the borderline civil war.

“I wonder if there’s some inspiration coming out of our strike in New York for the rest of the country. And I hope they see that, yes, you can stand together and say, ‘Enough is enough!’”

Another striker described the conditions at Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx. “I work in a very busy floor. As for the contract, we are supposed to get four patients. But before the strike, what happened is that management decided to give us more patients, five or six patients. And on top of that, they were giving us hallway patients. The floor was very overcrowded, very busy.”

“After every shift we work, when I go home, I feel exhausted, I feel tired, I feel burned out,” he continued. “It’s pretty challenging to work if you have a shift of two days back-to-back or three days back-to-back. You feel always tired the next day. So that’s the ongoing issue that the management is overlooking.”

Nurses on the picket line are watching developments closely on the West Coast at Kaiser Permanente, where 31,000 are preparing to strike. “We feel like if the California and Kaiser Permanente do a strike, it’s going to put more pressure on the management so they can negotiate with us for a fair contract,” he said.

“There is power and unity. So I want, I urge all my co-workers in different states to support us, support each other, and let’s get this done once and for all.”

The WSWS reporter raised the prospects of a general strike in Minneapolis, to which the nurse responded, “I feel very good about that. I feel very, very empowered by this.”



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