

Zohran Mamdani intervenes in effort to shut down the New York nurses strike

Daniel de Vries
22 January 2026

Eleven days into the strike by 15,000 nurses in New York City, talks are set to resume Thursday between the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) and the hospital systems of Montefiore, Mount Sinai and NewYork-Presbyterian.

In a statement on its website, NYSNA attributed the resumption of talks to the hospitals “being urged back to the negotiating table by Governor Hochul and Mayor Mamdani.” It is clear that NYSNA is working closely with Democratic Party officials, principally Zohran Mamdani, who appeared on the picket line this week for the second time in an effort to bring the strike to a close as quickly as possible.

The NYSNA statement even suggested that the union is prepared to send workers back to the job before they have a chance to vote on any potential deal, stating that the strike will continue only until “tentative agreements are reached with the hospitals.”

At a rally outside Mount Sinai on Tuesday, Mamdani reiterated his role in pushing for a deal to end the strike, stating, “We are encouraging everyone to return to that bargaining table.” He added that a strike is “not where workers want to be” and called for a “swift and urgent resolution,” making clear his priority was to bring the nurses back to work as quickly as possible.

Mamdani’s comments were calculated to appeal to the sentiments of striking nurses, many of whom have emphasized over the past week and a half that their strike is a defensive action. It has become necessary because the hospitals refuse to address intolerable conditions. Chronic understaffing is jeopardizing patient safety and the wellbeing of nurses, driving many to leave the profession altogether. The hospitals are even going further, demanding cuts to benefits, including to nurses’ own health coverage.

But in waging this struggle, nurses are not simply reacting defensively to unacceptable contract proposals

from the hospitals. Their fight for safe staffing levels poses a direct challenge to the priorities that dominate the healthcare industry—priorities set by millionaire executives and the billionaires who sit on the boards of New York’s hospital systems. Nurses are insisting that the needs of patients and healthcare workers must come first, not the financial interests of pharmaceutical companies, insurance giants or hospital-affiliated venture capital funds.

It is under these conditions that Mamdani’s intervention in the strike arises. Striking nurses, many of whom voted for Mamdani, must understand the social and political forces the mayor represents. What does his intervention in the strike signify? When he calls for an agreement to end the strike, whose interests will such a deal serve?

To answer these questions, it is instructive to review Mamdani’s relationship with the other major Democrat involved in the strike, Governor Kathy Hochul.

While Mamdani frequents the picket line mouthing words of support, Hochul’s hostility to the strike has been impossible to conceal. As governor, she signed an executive order authorizing hospitals to engage in strikebreaking operations by allowing travel nurses to operate without a license in New York state. Hochul’s strikebreaking even earned the praise of the far-right hacks on the *New York Post’s* editorial board, who wrote of the governor’s conduct during the strike, “New York is lucky to have at least *one* top executive who retains a firm grip on reality.”

Appearing last week on MS NOW’s *The Briefing With Jen Psaki*, Mamdani said he appreciates “the relationship and the partnership” he’s built with Hochul, who campaigned with the mayor in the closing stages of last year’s election. He added, “It’s almost felt as if there are two different constituencies that they represent, when in fact, we’re all representing New Yorkers. And I’ve appreciated this governor, Governor Hochul, in

showcasing the leadership necessary to deliver for those same New Yorkers.”

In his commitment to govern for all New Yorkers, including the ultra-wealthy, Mamdani recently set aside his campaign pledge to raise taxes on millionaires and corporations at Hochul’s behest. Instead, the pair have announced their intention to phase in an expansion of child care, though the source of funding for even the initial, extremely modest phase remains unclear.

The abandonment of the proposal to tax the rich, presented as a “pragmatic” maneuver, is indicative of the political subterfuge that Mamdani specializes in. While Mamdani makes populist-sounding appeals to fight the oligarchy, his politics aim to convince workers that their interests can be reconciled with those of Wall Street, big real estate, and corporate CEOs who dictate economic conditions.

Mamdani’s politically duplicitous role was expressed in the “partnership” he announced with President Trump during his visit to the White House in November. Since then, Mamdani has maintained what he describes as an “honest and productive” relationship with the fascist Trump. Mamdani’s perspective, that workers can achieve gains by working with a gangster in the midst of establishing a presidential dictatorship, will come to define the term *political bankruptcy*.

The fact that nurses at some of the wealthiest hospitals in the wealthiest city in America have been forced to strike over such basic issues as safe staffing levels, the preservation of health care coverage, and safe working conditions demonstrates that the needs of workers are coming into direct conflict with the interests of the oligarchy. Nurses’ immediate demands, along with broader social needs, including the establishment of healthcare as a fundamental social right guaranteed to all, can only be realized to the extent that workers take up a struggle against the oligarchy rather than accept their subordination to it.

Mamdani’s intervention in the strike is an attempt to bring the workers’ mobilization to an end as quickly as possible on terms demanded by the ruling class. New York, along with the rest of the country, is experiencing levels of social anger that are bursting at the seams.

The Democratic Party, which represents a section of Wall Street and the military intelligence apparatus more concerned with ensuring continuity and stability, is deeply concerned about the potential for struggles like the nurses’ strike to go beyond immediate contractual issues and spark a broader movement against inequality,

exploitation and dictatorship.

The success of the nurses’ strike depends on a clear assessment of the forces involved. It’s not a question of Mamdani or any other politician showing up on the picket line, with their honeyed words. The two big-business political parties are well schooled in speaking out of both sides of their mouths. Ultimately it’s a question of whose class interests they serve.

While the NYNSA works with Mamdani to try to shut down the strike, the rest of the trade union apparatus is doing nothing to mobilize broader support.

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.

The real allies of striking nurses are the fellow hospital workers who are being forced by their union to cross picket lines, the nurses at other public and non-profit hospitals that face the exact same conditions, the transit workers who are launching a contract struggle of their own presently, and the logistics workers struggling against dangerous working conditions.

The nurses’ strike coincides with a broader intensification of the class struggle. Trump is accelerating this process, most recently by deploying thousands of ICE agents and other federal forces to occupy Minneapolis, part of a broader attempt to impose dictatorial control and suppress any and all opposition.

The response by the working class is not acquiescence, but the initiation of a struggle against it, including calls for a general strike in Minneapolis on Friday. Beyond Minneapolis, workers are being drawn into struggle, including nurses in California who are preparing a strike of their own against Kaiser Permanente, raising the possibility of coordinated action among healthcare workers around the country.

To win the strike, nurses must connect with and develop the initiative of the workers, building rank-and-file committees to transform the strike into a wider offensive.



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