"I think the struggle should be nationwide"

As New York nurses' strike reaches a critical junction, workers and physicians across the US call for broader struggle

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The World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) *will host an online meeting in support of the 15,000 striking New York nurses at 3:00 p.m. EST on Sunday, January 25. Click here to register for the meeting.*

The strike by 15,000 New York City nurses entered a critical stage Thursday as bargaining resumed between the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) and management at the city's three major hospital systems: Montefiore, Mount Sinai and New York-Presbyterian.

Talks are resuming under mediation. Nurses have been on strike since January 12, maintaining daily picket lines outside hospital facilities across the city.

As negotiations restart, nurses report that hospital management has engaged in retaliatory actions against striking workers, including the unlawful withholding of pay and disciplinary measures aimed at intimidating nurses and forcing an end to the walkout.

At Mount Sinai, several labor and delivery nurses were terminated via voicemail on the eve of the strike. The terminations followed earlier disciplinary actions taken against outspoken nurse leaders in the weeks leading up to the walkout, including three nurses who were disciplined for speaking to the press after an active shooter event. NYSNA has filed unfair labor practice charges in response, citing retaliation for union activity.

As management escalates pressure, a new section of healthcare workers has announced plans to join nurses on the picket line. Physicians affiliated with the Committee of Interns and Residents-SEIU (CIR-SEIU) said off-duty doctors will take part in picket actions beginning Monday evening at Montefiore's Henry and Lucy Moses campus.

Only off-duty physicians will participate, however. CIR-SEIU said the so-called "picket parties" will begin at 6:00 p.m. Monday if the strike continues. Pickets normally end at 7:00 p.m.

The trade union apparatus in New York has worked to systematically isolate the strike. The NYNSA sought to prevent a strike altogether and then reached last-minute deals with 11 out of 15 hospitals.

Democratic Party officials have also appeared on the picket lines in recent days, with the aim of bringing the strike to a conclusion.

This is the significance of the intervention of New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who called for a swift conclusion earlier this week. While mouthing words of support for nurses, Mamdani is closely allied with New York Governor Kathy Hochul, whose administration intervened in the dispute by authorizing hospitals to bring in out-of-state nurses to replace strikers.

Voices from the picket line

Nurses speaking from picket lines across New York City described unsafe staffing levels and the broader political crisis.

A pediatric nurse said they had "no health insurance, that means no pharmaceuticals. ... I am going without healthcare. My husband needs healthcare. I am trying to

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get healthcare elsewhere." She said that nurses are not receiving strike pay and are resorting to GoFundMe to raise money.

"We shouldn't have to do this. There are a lot of things we shouldn't have to do. We should have to be fighting ICE." She added, "We are in a very very bad place. We have to do what we can do to have equality in our country."

She denounced Governor Hochul for giving "the elite hospitals ... a whole bunch of money to fund their scabs." CEOs are getting millions, and the state is paying for scabs.

The pay for the CEOs is "astronomical. They make in a week what the nurses make in a year." She also spoke about the disastrous state of staffing, nothing that she had to leave a department because it was so understaffed.

"We have to get a cost of living. We are in New York City. ... If they want quality nurses, they have to be able to afford the cost of living in the area."

When asked about the broader political situation workers are confronting, especially in Minneapolis, another nurse told the WSWS, "I just feel generally there's just an assault on our constitutional rights. What happened in Minnesota is just one component of that. There are a lot of things [happening] where there just are no precedents at this point."

Another nurse said, "I think the struggle should be nationwide, like with California nurses who are going out. We're striking here, but we're taking a risk if we can't get benefits from it. I mean, that's all over the place. It's not just in healthcare, but in any other [industry]."

In general, nurses emphasized that the strike is driven by longstanding safety concerns that remain unresolved as negotiations resume.

Support for the strike has also come from workers inside and outside the healthcare industry. In Minneapolis, the WSWS spoke with UPS workers who spoke in support of the striking NYSNA nurses and voiced support for a broader general strike, linking the nurses' struggle to wider opposition among workers to attacks on democratic rights, unsafe work conditions and concessions demanded by management.

A Minnesota EMT worker said about the NYSNA strike, "I love to see nurses fighting this horrible treatment they're getting—underpaid, overworked, understaffed."

Nurses at Genesys hospitals in Michigan have also expressed solidarity with the striking New York nurses, pointing to growing national attention on contract battles across the healthcare system.

The WSWS urges nurses to form rank-and-file strike committees to assert control over the strike, including by establishing a list of non-negotiable demands before any return to work. They should also oppose any end to the strike before an agreement is voted on. The NYNSA indicated in a statement this week that it could conclude a strike based only on a tentative agreement.

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.

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