

Striking Genesys nurses join New York City nurses' call for a general strike

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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 p.m. EST on Sunday, January 25. [Click here to register for the meeting.](#)

As of this writing, 700 Henry Ford Health's Genesys Hospital nurses and caseworkers in Grand Blanc, Michigan, have been on strike for five months. Despite threats of permanent replacement by strikebreakers and isolation imposed by the Teamsters bureaucracy, workers have expressed their determination to continue the strike. Workers are demanding safe nurse-to-patient ratios, protection against victimization and wage increases beyond inflation.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to striking Genesys workers about calls by New York City and Minneapolis healthcare workers for a general strike. A senior nurse said, "You're in the county of the famous sit-down strikes. For New York, it's time! You told me I was essential (in 2020). Now I'm here for everyone—not just my fellow nurses, but everybody."

An RN speaking directly to New York City nurses said, "I would definitely call for a general strike. I think that's a great idea. This is a national problem, if not a world problem, with nurses, and it's time to stand up for your safety and your license. You're the one who earned your nursing license, not them. They (Henry Ford Health) don't own that, and it will ultimately be us they'll try to pin any type of disciplinary action on. So absolutely—and stay the course!"

"We're on day 142, and we have not wavered. There are a few who have gone back in, but generally we've stayed the course. It's going to be 4 degrees by the time I leave tonight, but it's still better than being in there and risking my nursing license or killing someone because we're cutting corners. I don't want that on my conscience."

With continued rank-and-file opposition, management has brought in scab nurses for more than \$100 per hour, encouraging striking workers to break the picket line. The Teamsters bureaucracy has refused to mobilize other Teamsters and healthcare workers from other hospitals in opposition to the strikebreaking. Instead, they allowed the escalation of Henry Ford's offensive by dismantling pickets at the hospital entrance. According to striking nurses, a contract is to be presented with no definite timeline or details.

The answer to management's attack on nurses is to expand the struggle to other hospitals. A strike of 31,000 nurses and healthcare professionals in California has been announced, involving 20 hospitals and clinics. This includes the ongoing New York City strike and the upcoming Michigan Medicine contract struggle involving more than 6,000 nurses. The struggle at Genesys pits nurses and caseworkers against the corporate healthcare system, which prioritizes profits over patient safety. While the Teamsters isolate the strike, claiming legal constraints, the situation demands an independent perspective.

Striking workers must develop rank-and-file committees to expand their struggle. This requires democratically electing trusted workers to take control of the strike and negotiations and reaching out to healthcare workers across hospital systems and other sections of the working class.

It must also be noted that even as Immigration and Customs Enforcement continues its violence—with the 11th Airborne Division placed on standby for deployment against protests—the Minnesota Nurses Association issued a statement Saturday calling on its members "to honor the no-strike provisions of their contracts and report to work as scheduled," under the fraudulent pretext that nurses "hold a unique and

essential role as caregivers and patient advocates.”

The RN continued, “Like you said, call for a general strike—and we’re saying that includes all workers: postal workers, etc. My dad was an autoworker. Growing up, we were not super wealthy, but not poverty-stricken either.” She continued, “I feel like I’m closer to the poverty level now. That’s really strange and sad, because I’m not out here just for money. I don’t even care at this point about a raise. It would be nice, but it’s devastating to see people I know working two and three jobs and still not making ends meet. It’s sickening and a global issue.”

Hearing about the deaths of postal workers Nick Acker and Russell Scruggs, she stated, “I didn’t even know there was such a large sorting machine that could suck in a human being and kill him. If conditions are unsafe—like with postal workers—it’s unsafe to your livelihood. We worry about making a fatal error because we’re rushing around. The best thing about being a nurse is the time I can give to a patient—when I can sit down, spend time in the room, talk to them and educate them. Most of our patients want education.”

A senior nurse elaborated on conditions from the beginning of the pandemic to the present. “When Genesys ran this place, it was amazing. People were here day and night and would do anything for their hospital. When they sold it to Ascension, we were hopeful, but it went downhill. Then COVID happened, and we lost people left and right. Many of our fellow nurses left. We told pregnant nurses they had to go because we didn’t know what was going to happen. We did our best.

“With COVID, we worked wearing garbage bags while people told us it was a joke. The hospital gave me an N95 and said, ‘By the way, put it in a brown paper bag—it lasts longer,’ despite the directions on the package. I called family, friends—anyone—to give me protection so I could do my job. Would you send a firefighter in without equipment to save your family?

“As time goes on, you lose more people. Management says, ‘You can’t use this, you can’t use that—we have to save money here and there.’ Then new nurses lose their minds day by day. They don’t get the information they need because medical protocols are changing almost daily.”

She cited as an example the recent lawsuit filed by Dr. Sudesh Ebenezer over retaliation after Hurley

Medical Center in Flint mishandled the care of an infant—failing to perform basic tests and losing track of the child within the hospital. The 12-month-old baby died as a consequence.



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