

NYSNA seeks to undermine nurses strike as hospitals move to replace workers

Erik Schreiber
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Hundreds of nurses rallied yesterday in New York's Foley Square, where they denounced attempts by four private nonprofit hospitals to break their strike. These efforts have included threats to fire nurses who do not return to work—even without a tentative agreement—and threats to declare an impasse in negotiations as a pretext to impose management's terms unilaterally.

At the rally, nurses also spoke out in defense of immigrants. Inside a federal building on Foley Square, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have been abducting immigrants during routine court check-ins. The nurses' protest reflects the widespread opposition to ICE across the country, which finds no expression in official politics. The kidnapping, brutalization and deportation of immigrant workers represent the sharpest edge of the financial oligarchy's offensive against the entire working class.

On Monday, nurses marched to the office of Governor Kathy Hochul, a right-wing Democrat, to protest her efforts to break their strike. At the strike's outset, Hochul declared a disaster emergency to allow nurses licensed in other states and in Canada to practice in New York.

Just hours after the protest concluded, Hochul extended the emergency declaration, demonstrating her contempt for the nurses and her alignment with the billionaire trustees who control the hospitals. In her statement extending the declaration, Hochul insulted nurses' intelligence by claiming that the measure was "not intended to afford leverage to any party in collective bargaining."

Earlier this week, negotiations resumed between the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) and the three healthcare systems that operate the four striking hospitals. Speaking with one voice, hospital management demanded that the union submit a "bare-

bones" proposal.

NYSNA immediately complied, emphasizing its desire "to bring hospital executives back to the table" and "get nurses back to work." It made no effort to fight back or mobilize its broader membership against the hospitals' intimidation tactics.

In a statement Monday, NYSNA admitted it had "significantly revised and moderated our proposals." These euphemisms amount to a declaration of surrender. Yet even this subservience failed to appease management. The hospitals' latest proposals ignored safe staffing—the nurses' central demand throughout the three-week strike—and failed to offer adequate protections against workplace violence, another key issue.

NYSNA's attempted sabotage of the strike has emboldened management. By withdrawing strike notices—often without even securing tentative agreements—the union blocked a unified struggle of 21,000 nurses across 15 hospitals in New York City and Long Island, where contracts expired simultaneously. NYSNA continues to collect dues but refuses to provide strike pay. It has done nothing to expand the strike beyond the four hospitals involved, or to rally support from other healthcare workers.

Despite NYSNA's groveling, hospitals are not guaranteeing that striking nurses will be allowed to return to work. Mount Sinai recently posted advertisements for new temporary contract nurse positions starting in mid-February. These positions, created to help the hospital weather the strike, could easily be made permanent.

Moreover, hospitals are threatening to delay the return of striking nurses even if tentative agreements are reached. Displaying brazen contempt, management has suggested that replacement nurses may be

prioritized over the strikers. “NYSNA nurses emphasize that the strike will not be over until all members return to work,” the union declared in a statement—without offering any indication of how it would prevent permanent replacements.

Meanwhile, nurses at Brooklyn Hospital Center have lost their healthcare benefits because management has failed to pay its contributions for three consecutive months. Brooklyn Hospital was among the 15 facilities whose contracts expired on December 31. On January 9, NYSNA rescinded its strike notice there, citing a tentative agreement reached with management. The union thus prevented a strike even as the hospital withheld healthcare and pension contributions—before nurses had even seen, let alone voted on, the agreement.

On Monday, NYSNA held an ineffectual “speak-out” at Brooklyn Hospital Center to demand that management resume contributions. But it has not proposed mobilizing Brooklyn nurses in solidarity with the 15,000 striking nurses, who have also lost their health coverage.

From the start, NYSNA has weakened and divided its members. It encouraged nurses to appeal to Democratic politicians like Hochul, who brought in strikebreakers, and Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who feigns support for the nurses while touting his “partnership” with the governor.

NYSNA blocked a mass strike of 21,000 nurses and has not called on other healthcare workers—such as medical technicians, residents, paramedics, or transport workers—to join the strike. To help the hospitals starve the nurses into submission, it is withholding strike pay and has repeatedly shown its willingness to abandon the nurses’ core demands.

The striking nurses enjoy strong support from coworkers at other hospitals, fellow healthcare workers and the broader working class. The strike can be won if this support is actively mobilized and the strike is expanded to include all the hospitals where strike notices were withdrawn.

To achieve this, nurses must take control of their struggle out of the hands of the NYSNA apparatus by forming rank-and-file committees at every facility. These committees must define non-negotiable demands, insist that the strike not end without full tentative agreements and ensure that any agreements are subject to democratic votes.

Furthermore, nurses must link their struggle with those of 31,000 striking Kaiser Permanente healthcare workers in California and Hawaii, and the 700 nurses and caseworkers on strike at Henry Ford Genesys Hospital in Michigan. As recognized at the Foley Square rally, the defense of healthcare is inseparable from the defense of immigrant rights. Achieving these goals requires confronting the financial oligarchy, which subordinates all social needs to the accumulation of profit.



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