

The US nurses' strikes and the call for a general strike against Trump: How workers must prepare

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A powerful movement of opposition is emerging in the United States against the Trump administration. Mass demonstrations over the murders of Alex Pretti and Renée Nicole Good in Minneapolis have raised the demand for a general strike. This is an anticipation of the entry of the American working class into historic struggles.

Currently, 31,000 Kaiser nurses on the West Coast and 15,000 nurses in New York City are on strike. At Kaiser, an additional 3,000 technicians and pharmacists are set to join nurses on the picket line. These strikes enjoy broad support, driven by the growing recognition that workers are confronting an oligarchy whose parasitic social interests lie at the heart of the crisis.

The strikes are growing in size, intensity and length. In New York City, the walkout is continuing after three weeks despite threats of mass firings. Management is openly advertising scab positions starting in mid-February. At Brooklyn Hospital Center—one of several facilities where nurses remain without a contract but have been blocked from striking by the union bureaucracy—management has unilaterally cut off healthcare coverage, leaving nurses unable to access the very care they provide to others.

Nurses are on the front lines of the ruling class's war on society. They have borne the consequences of the government's refusal to implement public health measures during the pandemic—decisions made to protect corporate profits. Now, the country is even less prepared than before. An estimated 260 million Americans were infected with COVID-19 last year. The US is also on the verge of losing its measles elimination status, with outbreaks emerging in ICE concentration camps.

Other sections of the working class are also pressing for a fight:

On Thursday, 40,000 graduate students across the 10-campus University of California system begin a strike authorization vote.

On Sunday, contracts expired for 30,000 oil refinery workers, responsible for two-thirds of US oil refining capacity.

- Contracts have expired for most major California school

districts, with strikes already authorized in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

- A major contract covering 30,000 United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) at Stop & Shop is set to expire later this month.

- Bargaining begins this month for the next contract for city postal carriers. On February 22, demonstrations are planned against the deadly cost-cutting that has already claimed the lives of postal workers.

- Throughout the year, contracts will expire for hundreds of thousands of New York City public sector workers, including subway workers in May.

- And on September 1, contracts for 25,000 steelworkers are set to expire.

A profound change is underway, one that is reaching ever deeper into the ranks of the working class. After more than four decades of suppressed struggles—following the betrayals and defeats imposed in the 1980s—the American working class is beginning to move once again.

Workers are being driven into struggle by the most profound crisis in the history of American—and, in fact, global—capitalism. The working class of the 21st century is vastly larger, more internationally connected and more objectively powerful than at any previous point in history.

The movement against Trump and dictatorship must be anchored in the social power of the working class. The ongoing strikes must be supported, expanded and unified across industries. The protest movement must develop an explicitly class-conscious and anti-capitalist orientation, aimed at mobilizing the immense economic strength of the working class. It must assert itself as the leading force in the fight against dictatorship, drawing behind it students and broad layers of the middle class now entering into struggle.

This means combining the fight against dictatorship and war with the defense of the economic and social interests of the working class. Recognition of the organic connection between the Trump administration's attack on democratic rights and the domination of society by a corporate-financial oligarchy must be made the basis of the political strategy of the working class.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) seeks to develop workers' independent initiative by encouraging the formation of a network of rank-and-file committees across the country. Consisting of trusted shop floor leaders, these committees will create the means through which workers can share information, plan strategy and coordinate actions across factories and workplaces.

A critical element of these committees is their independence from all the forces seeking to derail or suppress the developing movement. While mouthing support at protests, Democratic officials are working behind the scenes to contain and defuse opposition. As a party of Wall Street, its main fear is that opposition to Trump will develop into a mass social upheaval that neither he nor they can control.

This is why the Democrats have voted to continue funding for the Department of Homeland Security and ICE, the very agencies carrying out state repression and murder.

Independence is also needed from the so-called "left" figures in and around the Democratic Party who are elevated to capture and contain social opposition. Zohran Mamdani was elected mayor of New York City on the basis of his self-described "socialism," but he has spent his time in office reassuring Wall Street and even visiting Trump in the White House to pledge to find "common ground."

While Mamdani made early appearances on the nurses' picket lines for the sake of publicity, he has remained silent in the face of mass threats to fire nurses and Governor Hochul's extension of emergency powers to break their strike.

The IWA-RFC seeks to create the means through which workers can overcome the deliberate sabotage of the union bureaucracy. The response of the union officials to the growing calls for a general strike is one of fear and hostility, because such a movement would threaten their financial interests, including billions of dollars in assets and their entrenched ties to corporate management and the state.

In response to the ICE murders in Minneapolis, the United Auto Workers (UAW) issued a statement acknowledging that "our freedom to strike, or to walk a picket line to win a better life, may be threatened next." But this has been accompanied by a refusal to take any concrete action. In practice, the UAW bureaucracy, which supports Trump's economic nationalism, plays a key role in suppressing the very right it claims to defend.

In Minneapolis, the unions have demanded that workers continue to honor "no-strike clauses" written into contracts over decades, even in the face of a fascist threat. In Chicago, the teachers union called for afterschool protests at local Target stores while actively deleting Facebook comments from members calling for strike action.

The prevailing attitude among the union bureaucracies is summed up by the infamous phrase adopted by a San Diego teachers union: "Obey now, grieve later." In other words,

submit now, fight never.

In New York City, the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) has deliberately restricted the strike to just 4 of 15 facilities, calling off walkouts at the others without securing agreements. At Kaiser Permanente, the UNAC/UHCP union is concerned mainly with preserving the Labor-Management Partnership, a corporatist scheme that has funneled millions into union coffers.

The union apparatus is integrated with the corporate political establishment and supports the same nationalist "America First" agenda promoted by Trump and the Democrats alike. Breaking free from this stranglehold requires that workers reject this poison and unite with immigrant workers and workers all over the world against inequality, war and dictatorship.

The strikes and protests now erupting across the country are animated not only by specific contract issues but by a deep and growing anger over intolerable levels of exploitation and inequality. A tiny financial oligarchy controls staggering wealth while working people are forced to choose between groceries and rent.

The IWA-RFC encourages the building of committees that can break the grip of the bureaucracies, transfer power to the rank and file and establish real democratic decision-making power.

Such a movement must confront not only the corporations but the political system that exists to defend their wealth and power. The working class cannot advance its interests within the framework of this corrupt system. It must build its own political leadership and fight to reorganize society based on equality and human need, not profit.

That means taking aim at the foundations of capitalist rule. The fight for workers' power is inseparable from the fight to expropriate the billionaires and place the economy under the democratic control of the working class. The fortunes of figures like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos—pillars of the fascist right and profiteers of mass exploitation—must be seized and used to fund healthcare, education, housing and jobs.



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