

Widespread anger over NYSNA's sellout bid to end New York nurses' strike

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On Tuesday, February 10, at 7:30 p.m. Eastern/4:30 p.m. Pacific, the WSWs and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees are hosting an online meeting, "The Nurses' Strikes and the Movement Against Dictatorship." Register here to attend.

The New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) announced tentative agreements Monday covering three of the four hospitals involved in the month-long strike of 15,000 nurses in New York City. The union bureaucracy is preparing to send nurses at the facilities operated by Montefiore and Mount Sinai back to work, leaving the remaining 4,500 nurses at NewYork-Presbyterian to fight on their own.

A snap vote on the agreement has been called, with voting beginning Monday and concluding either Tuesday or Wednesday, depending on the hospital. The New York Healthcare Workers Rank-and-File Committee (NYHW-RFC) is calling on nurses to vote "no" on the agreements by the widest possible margin.

NYSNA's attempt to demobilize three-quarters of the strike without a comprehensive settlement for all the hospitals is a stab in the back. Even if the contract included adequate raises and the necessary improvements to staffing levels and safety—which it absolutely does not—the betrayal of NewYork-Presbyterian nurses cannot be justified.

The tentative agreements do nothing to resolve the core issues of unsafe staffing and overcrowding. At Mount Sinai, the hospital agreed to just 30 additional full-time hires out of the 700 that were needed. At Montefiore, the agreement omits any measures to alleviate overcrowding, leaving in place a situation in which nurses are often forced to treat patients crammed into hallways.

On pay, nurses would receive only around a 12

percent wage increase over three years, nowhere near the 30 percent demand at the outset of negotiations. However, even the 12 percent comes with givebacks, as the raises are not retroactive and only start in March.

Meanwhile, the tentative agreements do not reinstate fired nurses, effectively sanctioning the victimization of nurses. On the eve of the strike, Mount Sinai fired three labor and delivery nurses based on false accusations of hiding supplies from scab nurses. The firings followed disciplinary action against nurses, who raised security concerns after an incident with an armed individual in December.

The NYHW-RFC warned in its founding statement that the union bureaucracy was preparing to shut down the strike on management's terms. The agreement announced Monday fully vindicates this assessment. That statement declared: "The strike can be won, but only if healthcare workers take matters into their own hands." The purpose of the committee, it explained, is to be "an organization controlled by workers ourselves, independent of the union apparatus, to assert democratic control over bargaining and strike strategy."

The attempt to break the unity of the strike has provoked outrage, with one Mount Sinai nurse describing her coworkers as "filled with rage." Many are mobilizing to reject the contracts. "Out together, in together" has emerged as a powerful slogan among nurses in response to the sellout.

The sellout comes at precisely the point when the nurses' position is at its most powerful. On the West Coast, pharmacy and lab employees walked off the job Monday, joining 31,000 Kaiser Permanente nurses and healthcare workers, who have been on strike for two weeks. Also on Monday, 6,000 public school teachers began a strike in San Francisco, shutting down the district's 120 schools.

The eruption of strikes on both coasts occurs alongside mass opposition to the brutal ICE murders in Minneapolis, triggering widespread protests, school walkouts and calls for a general strike.

The New York nurses' strike is part of this developing working class movement. But it faces an obstacle in the trade union bureaucrats, who are working on behalf of management and corporate politicians to disrupt and disorganize this movement. Already before the strike, NYSNA had canceled action at 11 of 15 hospitals without having even reached tentative agreements.

Rather than appeal to the immense support for the strike in the working class, NYSNA has paraded Democratic Party officials to mouth empty support on the picket lines. But the Democratic Party has proved to be the biggest ally of the hospital executives, not striking workers. Governor Kathy Hochul has renewed a strikebreaking emergency order allowing nurses without licenses in the state to work as scabs.

Mayor and self-described "democratic socialist" Zohran Mamdani appeared twice on the picket lines, where he denounced the tens of millions in compensation for hospital executives. Now, he is not only publicly supporting Hochul but also the New York police, who arrested striking nurses protesting outside of the headquarters of the Greater New York Hospital Association.

There can be no doubt that the contract was worked out in coordination with the Mamdani administration, in particular, Deputy Mayor for "Economic Justice" Julie Su. The former Labor Secretary under President Joe Biden, she specialized in brokering contracts to head off or shut down strikes which challenged the interests of the ruling elite.

In 2023, she rammed through a West Coast docks contract after dockworkers began organizing wildcat actions in defiance of the ILWU (International Longshore and Warehouse Union) keeping them on the job for a year past the previous deal's expiration. In 2024, she was dispatched to shut down a strike at Boeing in a similar fashion. She was similarly involved in the ban on a national rail strike in 2022 and a White House-backed autoworkers' contract in 2023 which has led to thousands of layoffs.

NYSNA and hospital executives are banking on the calculation that the economic strain of the strike will

weaken nurses' resolve and provide enough "yes" votes to pass the sellout agreement. The strain is real. The union has refused to provide strike pay, while the hospitals have cut off health insurance.

But nurses can turn the tables. The movement against the contracts must be a starting point for a new strategy, controlled democratically from below. At every hospital, nurses should hold emergency meetings to elect rank-and-file committees, consisting of the most trusted nurses and not union officials, to prepare for the expansion of the strike to all 15 facilities. They must demand immediate, retroactive strike pay to provision nurses for a serious fight and to counteract attempts to soften them up.

Rejecting the subordination of their struggle to one or another establishment politician, nurses must then turn to their real allies—the working class. They should organize pickets to fan out to major workplaces across the city to appeal for the widest support and build lines of communication with Kaiser workers on the West Coast to coordinate strategy on a national scale.

On Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. Eastern Time/4:30 p.m. Pacific Time, the WSWs and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are holding an online meeting to discuss the way forward in the struggle. We urge all nurses looking for a way to oppose the sellout to attend and participate. Register for the meeting [here](#).



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