

“Nurses should demand an end to this sham vote”: Opening report to meeting of New York Healthcare Workers Rank-and-File Committee

Katy Kinner
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The New York Healthcare Workers Rank-and-File Committee hosted a well-attended meeting Tuesday evening, bringing together striking nurses in New York with other hospital workers in New York, strikers in California and other sections of workers.

The meeting was held a day after the New York State Nurses Association announced sellout tentative agreements with Montefiore and Mount Sinai and moved to shut down the strike at the remaining hospital system, NewYork Presbyterian. Union bureaucrats, including NYSNA President Nancy Hagans and Executive Director Pat Kane, intervened directly to reach a tentative agreement through bypassing the local negotiating committee, in blatant violation of the union’s bylaws.

Rank-and-file healthcare workers at the meeting discussed and adopted a resolution calling on nurses to overwhelmingly reject the illegitimate effort by the NYSNA leadership to ram through these sellout deals.

The opening report to the meeting was delivered by Katy Kinner, a med-surg and oncology nurse in Michigan, a member of the Socialist Equality Party, and a leader of the Healthcare Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Below we reprint the report.

Our meeting today is addressing the growing movement of nurses and healthcare workers across the country who are fighting for the most elemental necessities: proper staffing levels, the end of burnout, healthcare benefits for those who provide care and adequate wages to deal with the crushing cost of living. The strikes by nurses in New York City, at Kaiser Permanente and Genesys hospital in Michigan take place under conditions of an accelerating drive towards dictatorship, the recent murders of Renée Good and ICU nurse Alex Pretti in Minneapolis, and an assault on science and public health.

But we must be blunt. To take forward this fight it is necessary for rank-and-file nurses to take control of the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracy and put it in the hands of healthcare workers on the hospital and clinic floors.

This is demonstrated in the events in New York City, where the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) bureaucracy is attempting to rush through sellout contracts at three of the four striking hospitals, leaving New York-Presbyterian nurses isolated and out on strike alone. NYSNA officials are rushing through snap votes today and Wednesday without giving nurses adequate time to review or discuss the contracts. This crude maneuver is aimed at breaking the unity of nurses, isolating the remaining 4,200 strikers at NewYork-Presbyterian, and forcing their surrender.

Earlier today it was revealed that the top leadership of NYSNA violated

the union’s own bylaws by accepting this agreement without the approval of the local executive board at New York-Presbyterian. This proves the entire process is illegitimate and no vote should have ever taken place.

Rank-and-file nurses should demand an end to this sham vote and reject any results announced by the NYSNA leadership. At the same time, nurses must demand the resignation of all those organizing this travesty of democratic procedures, and for a new bargaining committee to be elected by the rank and file. This committee should outline a list of non-negotiable demands, drawn up at mass meetings of the rank and file, and a new strategy to win the strike. This includes expanding the strike across New York, including the 11 other hospitals in the city and on Long Island where contracts expired December 31.

The tentative agreement is an insult to nurses who have spent more than a month on the picket line, sacrificing without strike pay not just for themselves and their patients but for future generations. The TA does not come close to meeting nurses’ demands.

At Mount Sinai, the hospital has agreed to just 30 full-time hires out of the 700 demanded by nurses. At Montefiore, the tentative agreement does nothing to alleviate overcrowding, leaving in place conditions where patients continue to be boarded in hallways.

As for wages, the agreements propose a 12 percent increase over three years—nowhere near the 30 percent nurses are fighting for. This 12 percent increase includes major givebacks: no retroactive pay, and raises that do not begin until March.

In addition, the tentative agreements do not reinstate fired nurses—those accused of hiding supplies from scab nurses, as well as others who were fired after speaking out following safety incidents. This effectively sanctions the victimization of nurses and must be seen as a warning to all healthcare workers.

The deal signed by NYSNA accepts without question the claims by the corporate and financial oligarchy—backed by both corporate-controlled parties—that there simply is no money to meet the nurses’ demands for adequate staffing levels and decent pay and benefits.

What is the cost of hiring 700 new nurses at Mt. Sinai? Including full wages and benefits, the hospital system could hire 700 nurses for \$100 million. The hospital systems have already spent over \$100 million just staffing scab nurses for three weeks.

One hundred million is pocket change for someone like James Tisch and the other wealthy elite who sit on the board of Mount Sinai and New York Presbyterian. Tisch’s family fortune is over \$10 billion, so he could personally fund 700 new nurses with just 1 percent of his fortune, paying them for 100 years. One hundred million is just over .6 percent of the \$16 billion fortune of hedge fund investor Ray Dalio, who sits on the board of

trustees of New York-Presbyterian. He could personally fund 700 new nurse salaries for 160 years.

The resources exist, but the oligarchs refuse to part with anything. That is why the fight for the social rights of the working class is impossible without a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the oligarchy.

We are calling on nurses to join the New York Healthcare Workers Rank-and-File Committee, founded last week—an organization controlled by workers ourselves, independent of the union apparatus, to assert democratic control over bargaining and strike strategy.

As the opening statement of the New York Rank-and-File Committee explains:

The expansion of the strike is not a slogan; it is a practical necessity. If nurses at the hospitals where walkouts were canceled join the picket lines, if resident physicians, med-techs, and other hospital workers refuse to cross, and if workers in other industries mobilize in solidarity, the balance of forces can be decisively shifted.

The betrayal by the NYSNA bureaucracy is a crucial warning to the Kaiser workers: the same thing will be done to the striking workers in California and Hawaii by the Alliance of Health Care Unions unless rank-and-file workers take control and unite with healthcare workers, teachers and other workers across the country and beyond.

NYSNA officials acted to sabotage the fight yesterday just as 31,000 Kaiser healthcare workers were joined by an additional 4,000 pharmacists and technicians on the picket line. On Monday, 6,400 teachers in San Francisco also walked out, just days after 35,000 United Teachers Los Angeles members authorized a strike. Nearly 30,000 refinery workers are pressing for strike action against the betrayal of the United Steelworkers bureaucracy, and 40,000 graduate student workers are currently voting on strike authorization. In Greeley, Colorado, thousands of JBS meatpacking workers voted by 99 percent to strike, even though many are Haitian and other immigrant workers facing the threat of deportation. Seven hundred nurses at Genesys Hospital in Michigan remain on strike after five months.

This growing strike movement shows the real social force that is capable of defeating Trump's threat of dictatorship and fascism. Faced with popular opposition to the witch-hunting of immigrants, deteriorating living standards, massive job cuts and the explosive growth of social inequality, the Trump administration and the corporate and financial oligarchy it serves are preparing dictatorial measures to crush the resistance from the "enemy within," the working class.

A month ago, Trump's ICE paramilitary squads executed Renée Nicole Good in Minneapolis while the president threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act. The day after massive protests erupted in response, the Trump administration escalated further, killing another citizen—ICU nurse Alex Pretti. There have been increasing calls for a general strike, calls that have emerged from workers and young people themselves, not the trade union apparatus or the Democrats.

The Democratic Party, which defends the same corporate oligarchy, fears nothing more than a mass movement of the working class that breaks from the control of the union bureaucracy and challenges the capitalist system. In New York, Governor Hochul has backed the hospitals' strikebreaking operation while "democratic socialist" mayor Mamdani has deployed the police to arrest protesting nurses.

This afternoon, Bernie Sanders tweeted out his support for the NYSNA betrayal, saying: "Congratulations to the over 10,000 @nynurses who won a strong tentative agreement. It is time for NewYork-Presbyterian to put people before profits and reach a fair deal to protect patients and staff."

Striking Kaiser Permanente workers can expect no different from Governor Gavin Newsom, and state and local Democrats in California, who are working behind the scenes to shut your powerful strike down as soon as possible.

Striking nurses on both coasts are receiving genuine support from workers in other industries who recognize that they face the same conditions—worsening workloads, declining wages, and an oligarchy that continues to hoard vast wealth while the population struggles to survive.

American workers are beginning to reenter collective struggle, and today's working class is larger, more interconnected, and potentially more powerful than ever before. The nurses' strike has the potential to ignite a mass movement of the working class, and this fight must be developed into a sustained, nationwide mobilization—including preparation for an open-ended general strike—to defeat the Trump administration's systemic assault on healthcare and democratic rights.

The worsening conditions in healthcare are a nationwide problem. Hospitals everywhere are chronically understaffed and workers are overworked. Between 2022 and 2024, over 138,000 nurses have left the workforce since and a study from the National Board of nursing details that nearly 40 percent intend to leave by 2029.

Due to staffing losses and hospital closures, the number of staffed hospital beds has fallen by 16 percent since the onset of the pandemic—just as an aging population requires more care. At the same time, the healthcare system is dangerously unprepared for future COVID surges or a new pandemic altogether. Measles is spreading across the country, including in ICE detention facilities, where vulnerable populations are trapped in deplorable conditions without even access to clean water to make baby formula.

Healthcare is being dragged back a century. How long must nurses wait before we are seeing waves of patients with tuberculosis or cholera? Already the spread of preventable illness and the overcrowding of hospitals is an indictment of the profit system and the capitalist ruling class that enforces it.

Healthcare workers understand that these conditions cannot continue. The sharp rise in strike activity reflects this reality. But healthcare workers do not simply want to strike—they want to win. Winning safe staffing requires a political perspective that confronts the root causes of this crisis: the grotesque concentration of wealth and the subordination of healthcare to private profit. No one will fight for this except workers themselves. Join and build the rank-and-file committee now.



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