

New York nurses in “uprising” against union boss’s attempts to sabotage strike

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18 February 2026

Now in their sixth week of struggle, more than 4,200 nurses in New York City remain on strike against NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, with negotiations set to resume on Wednesday. Picket lines were well attended and boisterous on Tuesday as nurses waged a battle not only against a hospital system determined to funnel profits to healthcare corporations on the backs of workers, but also against the saboteurs who lead their own union.

Last week, NewYork-Presbyterian nurses overwhelmingly rejected a management-backed settlement offer that the executive committee had already turned down at the bargaining table. NYSNA’s leadership ignored the union’s bylaws and forced a snap vote anyway, hoping to browbeat strikers into accepting the sellout. The vote at NewYork-Presbyterian coincided with grossly inadequate tentative agreements at the Mount Sinai and Montefiore hospital systems, where more than 10,000 nurses were sent back to work last weekend.

“There’s a large uprising of rank-and-file nurses ready and determined to make big changes in our union,” one striking nurse told the WSW. Last week, nurses marched on the offices of NYSNA, denouncing President Nancy Hagans and her collaborators for union busting and raising demands for an investigation and resignations.

When Hagans appeared on WNYC radio’s Brian Lehrer Show last Friday, nurses flooded the lines. “The majority of us feel that this displayed union busting tactics coming from inside the house,” one nurse said. “We feel that NYSNA leadership owes an explanation and an apology and that they need to be held accountable for this behavior, as opposed to acting like it never happened.”

Another nurse called the attempt to shut down the

strike “a stab in the back.”

Hagans has absurdly attempted to justify her treachery by claiming she merely wanted to give workers a democratic vote. She brushed off a question about the isolation of NewYork-Presbyterian nurses, responding only that NYSNA members are “resilient.” Meanwhile, Hagans and the union leadership are doing all they can to wear down that resilience, including a refusal to provide strike pay and other resources to help nurses withstand the financial strain of the strike.

But Hagans’ efforts to betray the nurses’ strike aren’t simply due to rotten leadership. They reflect the imperatives of the Democratic Party, with which she is deeply embedded. Hagans is well-connected to the Democratic leadership in New York, including Governor Kathy Hochul and Mayor Zohran Mamdani.

During the last gubernatorial race, Hagans lauded Hochul as a “fighter” and someone “who has that shared interest and vision.” Hochul has proven during the course of the strike whose side she is fighting for. On Tuesday, the governor extended for the sixth time an emergency decree authorizing travel nurses to work without a state license. In other words, Governor Hochul is a scab.

But Hagans is not just acting as an agent of the “centrist” wing of the Democratic Party. Democratic Socialist of America Mayor Zohran Mamdani invited Hagans to advise his mayoral transition’s Committee on Health. Mamdani included other union bureaucrats as well, notably Yvonne Armstrong of 1199 SEIU, who has ordered union members at NewYork-Presbyterian to cross the picket lines.

Reflecting his pledge to govern for all New Yorkers—including the oligarchs—Mamdani also invited a representative from the Greater New York Hospital Association, the trade group representing the hospital

executives, to join his advisory team.

After appearing alongside Hagans on the picket line four weeks ago, Mamdani has been largely silent in public on the strike, apart from expressing “congratulations” to nurses after the shutdown of two-thirds of the strike last week. Mamdani’s pretense as a supporter of nurses is increasingly difficult to maintain, however, following his endorsement of the strike-breaking governor for reelection.

The overriding concern of the Democratic Party, from Mamdani to Hochul and beyond, has been to prevent the strike from becoming a catalyst for a broader movement against the subordination of healthcare and all basic needs to private profit, raising a challenge to the irrational and bankrupt social order. Hagans’ attempt to sabotage the strike reflects a union bureaucracy that works not on behalf of its membership, but in alliance with the Democratic Party as an instrument of the ruling class.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with striking nurses at NewYork-Presbyterian on Tuesday about the way forward for the strike following the rank-and-file rejection of the sellout.

“It’s a tough, tough, tough fight,” one nurse explained. “Now that the other hospitals have gotten their contracts ratified, it’s really only us left out here. But there still has been support from the other nurses at the other hospitals. They’ve come to our own strike line. And they’re still showing up with signs. There’s action going on still.”

Asked about the role of the Democrats, the nurse replied, “We weren’t really happy about Mamdani endorsing Governor Hochul for re-election. I don’t think I would vote for her.”

“The Democrats do not have a future,” a medical-surge nurse said. “They do not have a good plan. Mamdani is unproven, but New York City is one of the best places to fight for change.

“We want our jobs and to be able to help patients, but the hospital executives are about cutting costs. They are a business and about making money.”

A nurse with nine years at the Children’s Hospital neonatal intensive care unit explained, “There is a dichotomy in our strike situation. People are more engaged, but have also just gotten so numb to the many atrocities going on. The ruling class has a playbook. There are so many things going on. It feels unclear to

know what to do.”

The New York Healthcare Workers Rank-and-File Committee has outlined a fighting strategy to take the strike forward based on three fundamental principles: rank-and-file control over the strike, the mobilization of the broader working class and a rejection of the supposed “right” to profit.

On Friday, the committee published a statement stressing that “by asserting their own democratic control, expanding the strike and advancing a clear political perspective, NewYork-Presbyterian nurses can impose a genuine defeat on management and set a powerful example for healthcare workers and the entire working class.”

The demands of nurses for safe staffing, improved pay and other basic needs can be won, but it requires rank-and-file organization to take the initiative.



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