Company offers worse contract after SEIU shuts down strike of 950 Pennsylvania healthcare workers

Landon Gourov
13 August 2026

Management at Mount Nittany Medical Center in State College, Pennsylvania, has returned with a worse offer after a five-day strike by 950 workers. Service Employees International Union Healthcare PA (SEIU) ended the walkout on August 1 without a tentative agreement.

The strike began July 27 and involved registered nurses, imaging technicians, certified nursing assistants, respiratory therapists, environmental services staff and cafeteria workers. It was the first strike at Mount Nittany in 22 years. Workers voted nearly 99 percent in favor of striking on July 2, with wages and safety measures to protect staff from physical violence at the center of the dispute.

The SEIU was seeking 14.25 percent across-the-board wage increases over three years. Mount Nittany had proposed increases totaling 7 percent over three years—3 percent in the first year and 2 percent in each of the following two years. In its final pre-strike proposal, management instead offered a one-year contract extension with a 3 percent across-the-board raise, a $1,000 ratification bonus and pay upgrades for 18 job classifications. The union rejected the proposal. But even the SEIU's demand would not have made up for years of declining real wages.

At the first bargaining session after the strike, management cut its offer to annual wage increases of just 2 percent for each of the next three years, below the current inflation rate. It also withdrew previously offered pay upgrades for nearly 20 job categories and removed additional wage adjustments for nurses.

The reduced offer is retaliation for the strike. Management is trying to punish workers for using their collective strength and force them to return on worse terms. Tom Brezler, an X-ray special procedures technician at Mount Nittany, told Statecollege.com the hospital "want[s] to retaliate against us" for having gone on strike. Management itself cited the cost of the strike as one reason for reducing its offer.

Defeating management's attack requires broad support from healthcare workers throughout Pennsylvania and preparations for renewed action. The struggle cannot remain isolated in State College or confined to strikes lasting a few days that hand the initiative back to management when they end.

The SEIU is refusing to organize this fight. It has kept workers on the job, called no further action and made no appeal for healthcare workers elsewhere to come to their defense. As of August 13, it had announced no further bargaining sessions since August 3, leaving workers without a contract while management presses its advantage.

The strike was limited in advance to five days. Federal law required the union to give Mount Nittany at least 10 days' notice, but nothing required the walkout to end after five days. Management knew when workers would return before the strike began and used the notice period to recruit replacements.

The hospital spent $6.4 million on temporary workers to keep operations running. According to the union, this was nearly five times the normal payroll cost for the five-day period and could have funded an immediate 8 percent wage increase for all workers.

Mount Nittany terminated workers' health coverage during the strike. Registered nurse Hope Jasper told StateCollege.com that the cutoff left her husband, who has non-Hodgkin lymphoma and was preparing for treatment, suddenly without insurance. She described the loss of coverage as a "gut punch."

Mount Nittany executives claim that the hospital is not in a financial position to offer real wage increases. But workers point out that it recently earmarked $350 million to build a new patient tower while, according to the union, recording nearly $183 million in profits last year. Mount Nittany CEO Kathleen Rhine received more than $3.4 million in total reported compensation over the last two fiscal years.

Officials from Teamsters Local 8, CGE-UAW, SEIU Local 668 and Seven Mountains AFL-CIO endorsed the strike, but none organized joint action. Their endorsements left Mount Nittany workers to fight the hospital alone.

US Representative Ro Khanna, a "progressive Democrat," also visited the picket line and denounced the cutoff of workers' health coverage. "You guys have already paid for that health care," he said. "That's why I thought it was so outrageous that I had to stop here." The picket line served as a photo opportunity for a representative of a party that is a full partner in the bipartisan attack on healthcare. Although Khanna vocally supports "Medicare for All," he joined other Democrats in 2022 in voting for an omnibus spending bill that ended pandemic-era continuous Medicaid enrollment. The ensuing Medicaid "unwinding" produced more than 25 million disenrollments.

Mount Nittany workers have powerful potential allies. Their strike is part of a mounting wave of healthcare workers' struggles across North America. In January, 15,000 nurses in New York City went on strike for safe staffing, while nearly 31,000 Kaiser nurses struck in California and Hawaii. Last month, nurses at Mass General Brigham in Massachusetts voted 99.6 percent to strike, followed by a walkout of 4,500 nurses. Nurses at Henry Ford Genesys hospital in Grand Blanc, Michigan have been on strike since last September.

These struggles create the basis for a common fight against understaffing, unsafe conditions and the subordination of healthcare to profit. A direct appeal to these workers for active support would break the isolation on which Mount Nittany management depends. The SEIU instead confines each struggle to separate negotiations and limited actions.

The union bureaucracy is structurally integrated into the management of the healthcare industry. Its function is to regulate and suppress the class struggle, not to lead it. At Mount Nittany, its five-day limit allowed management to prepare for the strike, wait for its scheduled end and counterattack once workers were back on the job. Its refusal to prepare further action now leaves that counterattack unanswered.

Mount Nittany workers should form a rank-and-file committee, controlled from below and independent of the union apparatus. The committee should establish direct lines of communication with other healthcare workers, appeal for their support and prepare renewed action against management's retaliatory offer. It should fight for wage increases above inflation, enforceable protections against workplace violence, restoration of the withdrawn pay upgrades and reimbursement of medical costs caused by the insurance cutoff.

Management is counting on isolation and delay to wear workers down. The necessary response is to unite Mount Nittany workers with the broader movement of healthcare workers and mobilize their collective strength against the hospital's attack.