

Nurses at University Medical Center in New Orleans begin 2-day strike

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Nurses at the University Medical Center (UMC) in New Orleans are set to begin a two-day strike on Wednesday, following a strike vote on January 23. The nurses are members of the National Nurses Organizing Committee/National Nurses United (NNOC/NNU), the largest nurses union in the United States. The strike will cover eight hospitals in the New Orleans area which are part of the LCMC Health System (formerly known as Louisiana Children's Medical Center).

The strike is the latest in a series of actions by US healthcare workers since the beginning of the new year. In Portland, Oregon, thousands of healthcare workers have been on strike for nearly a month to demand safe staffing ratios, better wages, retroactive pay and better health benefits. In Pennsylvania, workers have authorized strike action at the Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Township and at UPMC (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center) Washington near Pittsburgh.

The New Orleans nurses voted to join the union nearly a year ago, but they say that management has stalled for months in negotiating their first contract. "We've been in 20 negotiation sessions so far, but we still haven't seen movement, significant movement to major proposals that we've submitted," said Dorothy Stencil, a registered ICU nurse.

Lauren Waddell, a nurse practitioner, told the NNU's website, "Since we began first contract negotiations in March, nurses have been united on proposals that we know would improve staff and patient conditions. Management has rejected these proposals and continues to minimize the severity of our concerns. Enough is enough."

Staffing ratios and stagnating wages have been the top concerns of nurses because they lead directly to potentially dangerous working conditions.

After the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 which flooded 80 percent of the city, healthcare, education and other public services have been placed at the mercy of corporate America, which used the "rebuilding" effort to make the city a test-bed for market-based "reforms." The city's massive Charity Hospital, which once operated as a state-operated free clinic for the poor and was also a major teaching hospital, was closed and left to rot, while its replacement, UMC, did not open for nearly a decade.

Under the Republican state administration of Bobby Jindal, all of the other facilities in the state's Charity Hospital system were rapidly sold off, ending one of the last remaining progressive reforms of Depression-era Governor Huey Long.

The city's school district was transformed almost overnight into the country's first all-charter school district. On the tenth anniversary of Katrina, the *World Socialist Web Site* reported extensively on the impact of the move.

What corporate America experimented on with New Orleans, the Trump administration is preparing to impose on a far greater scale across the whole country. The administration is planning trillions in cuts to Medicare and Medicaid with the collaboration of fascist billionaire Elon Musk. Through appointments such as anti-vaxxer Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to head Health and Human Services, it is attacking even the principle of public health.

Trump's policy amounts to a war on the entire working class. His attacks on immigrants are only the tip of the spear of his bid to establish a dictatorship in the US.

The rapidly growing wave of immigration protests points to the immense potential to mobilize the working class in defense of its rights. In a recent statement, the

Socialist Equality Party called “for the development of committees in neighborhoods, schools and workplaces to prepare, educate and organize workers and their families for the coming assault.”

It continued:

The committees will bring together teachers, students, parents, workers and concerned neighbors of all backgrounds to plan lawful public responses to attacks on members of the community under the principle: “An injury to one is an injury to all.” Wherever they function, committees will strive to break down all efforts by the two big business parties and the trade union bureaucracies to divide workers along immigration status or national background. They will expose the xenophobic lies of the corporate media by waging a campaign of mass political education aimed at rendering the population “wide awake” to the threat against democracy.

This requires workers assert control over their struggle against the trade union bureaucracy, many sections of which are lining up with Trump’s “America First” policies. After a delay of a week and a half, NNU has issued press releases condemning various elements of Trump’s health platform, including the nomination of Kennedy and his attacks on the rights of immigrant and transgender patients. But their toothless appeals to Democratic Party officials and calls for “employers to address our concerns about patient care” only give Trump the upper hand, since these will lead nowhere.

In its statement on immigration, the NNU states, “Nurses *call on the Trump administration* to keep hospitals and other health care facilities, as well as other previously protected areas such as schools and places of worship, safe for all people.” [Emphasis added]

Instead of begging hospital administrators, Democrats and even Trump to “see the light,” nurses and other sections of the working class must mobilize to wage a nationwide struggle against Trump’s policies. Organizing this fight requires the building of a network of rank-and-file committees, independent of both

parties and the union officials.



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