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USA

Nurses Leading the Class Struggle and Resistance to ICE

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Nurses in the United States, overwhelmingly women and in our big cities predominantly Black, Latin, and Asian, are both leading the fight for higher wages and better working conditions and the resistance to the Trump administration's attack on immigrants. Some 15,000 nurses in New York City struck several hospitals in New York City in January and February, staying out for weeks to win higher wages and safer staffing levels.

As Nancy Hagans, the president of the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) said, "For a month and a half, through some of the harshest weather this city has seen in years, nurses at NYP showed this city that they won't make any compromises to patient care."

And across the country, another union, National Nurses United, a union with 225,000 members has carried out mass protests at health centers in many cities calling for the abolition of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency."

The New York Nurses' Strike

In New York City, after weeks on strike, NYSNA won wage gains of 12% over the next three years, maintained health insurance benefits, and improved staffing levels, so that nurses are only responsible for a reasonable number of patients. The new contract also calls for protecting nurses from workplace violence, such as violent attacks by deranged patients, and greater protection for immigrant patients and nurses. Gema Demayo Medina, at Presbyterian, said, "We were waiting for this for forty days in rain and snow." Fifteen days in January were at or below freezing, one of the coldest winters in memory.

A remarkable 99% of union members voted to approve the new contract. The strike by 15,000 nurses was one of the largest and longest in U.S. history. In the middle of the negotiations, nurses at New York Presbyterian hospital, carrying signs saying "I'm Rank and File and I'm Voting No," did vote at first against ending the strike and demonstrated against their union leaders, calling for Hagans resignation, and in the end won an improved agreement.

Nurses Protecting Patients, Resisting ICE

National Nurses United (NNU), calling ICE and Customs and Border Patrol (CPB) "the country's greatest public health threat," carried out a countrywide protest against ICE on February 19. NNU calls for the abolition of ICE.

"We are way past the point of 'reform,'" said Mary Turner, an intensive care unit RN from Minneapolis, Minn. who is president of National Nurses United. "Reform only works when you care about abiding by and enforcing the law. Nurses make professional assessments and this is what we conclude: ICE and border patrol are violent, cruel, lawless, and racist organizations that the Trump administration is using as a paramilitary force to ultimately quash the American people's opposition to his fascist takeover of our democracy. Our hospital CEOs are at fault, too, for enabling Trump by doing nothing. We all need to wake up and shut ICE down now before it is too late."

Nurses Leading the Class Struggle and Resistance to ICE

In San Diego, California, where I've been for the last few weeks, nurses demonstrated at several hospitals, calling for the abolition of ICE, which they say is necessary for the health and safety of their patients and of local communities. ICE agents have beaten and gassed both immigrants and their supporters, and killed nurse Alex Pretti in Minneapolis.

A nurse in San Diego, Kendle Hargrove said, "ICE is a public health crisis because patients are afraid to seek care because they're afraid to go outside. People in the hospital should feel like they can seek care and not be in fear of persecution," she said. Missing their medical appointments can lead to sickness or even death.

Turner, NNU's president, said, "We are turning out on Feb. 19 to demand that Congress abolish ICE now, or face electoral consequences."

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