

## OHIO'S FIRST NURSES' STRIKE, 1966

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# Nurses Hold to Walkout; Hospitals Cut Patients

by Andrea Gambrel

When people think about labor conflict in Youngstown, they think about strikes in the manufacturing industry, specifically, in steel and auto. For example, the uprising of workers in East Youngstown in 1916, the Little Steel Strike in 1937, and the strike at GM (Lordstown) in 1972 bring to mind largely *men* struggling to establish rights in the workplace. People rarely think of the struggles of women and health care workers. Yet, in Youngstown, women and health care workers were involved in similar important struggles.

Up until 1966, nurses accepted poor wages and working conditions largely while simply focusing on caring for patients. The working conditions involved long hours, few health care and pensions benefits, no holiday benefits and arbitrary treatment by supervisors. Discrimination in both hiring and pay resulted in different wage rates between \$1.95 and \$2.30 per hours with differences between people with the same job and seniority. Making around \$4500 per year, the yearly salary was well below the \$6500 salary recommended by the American Nurses Association.

Early in 1966, nurses at the Youngstown Hospital Association voted to be represented by the Ohio State Nurses Association (OSNA) and began to negotiate their first contract. During the organizing drive, the YHA tried to prevent the organizing by offering full time nurses a ten-cent wage increase, and the part-timers a five-cent raise. But when the nurses voted to be represented by the OSNA, the Youngstown Hospital Association refused to negotiate with the new professional association which was called the Youngstown General Duty Nurses Association (YGDNA). When the nurses threatened a mass resignation on September 29th, the hospital finally began to negotiate and a walkout was temporarily averted.

When bargaining began smaller issues were quickly settled leaving four critical issues unresolved: 1) pay, 2) Association security, labeled by the YHA as "union shops," 3) inclusion of head nurses in the bargaining unit, and 4) pay for surgical nurses on call. After two months, YHA attempted to circumvent the new union by posting a final offer on bulletin boards which had not been presented at the bargaining table. The nurses charged YHA with not bargaining in good faith and reiterated their resignation threat. At the same time, the YGDNA offered to provide sufficient emergency nursing services without pay to carry out an orderly reduction of the patient population. But the hospital refused the offer. On December 1, 1966, the YGDNA became the first nurses in Ohio to engage in a mass resignation or "strike," and according to the American Nurses Association it may have been the first concerted action by nurses in a labor dispute in the nation.



The negotiating committee of the Youngstown Hospital Association takes a look at the hospital's latest proposal. The nurses were forced to resign for 13 days in 1966 before the hospital would negotiate a fair contract.

While technically not a strike, the nurses still demonstrated outside the hospitals at shift changes. Overall, approximately 350 of the 400 head and general duty nurses signed resignations. Local support for the nurses was high, especially among the public safety forces and family members who were part of other unions. Letters of support and money poured in from all over the country to help the nurses financially.

The Weather  
Youngstown—Met as cold today, few snow flurries tonight. Little change Wednesday. N.E. Ohio and Western Pa.—Snow today, tonight. Cloudy tomorrow. City high today 38, overnight low 28.

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(Financial News on Page 84)  
(Sports News on Pages 85-87)

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## NURSES, HOSPITALS REACH AGREEMENT

A federal mediator was called in on Friday, December 2, 1966 and negotiations continued over the next 10 days. On December 13, an agreement was reached. The nurses accepted the agreement unanimously. It provided wage increases of 10.5% in the first year and 7.4% in the second year, voluntary membership in the Ohio State Nurses Association, an incremental pay scale, premium pay for surgical nurses on-call of \$1 per hour plus the time worked, and exclusion of head nurses from the bargaining unit. Lastly, the agreement provided that all nurses resignations be rescinded and automatically returned to their former positions "without reprisals or discrimination" as these positions became available, and in accordance with

seniority and ability, and subject to staffing patterns and needs of the hospital. Further, it included holidays, pension, vacations, sick leave, health and accident insurance, hospitalization, and inclusion of part-time employees in all fringe benefits on a pro-rate basis. Lastly, a grievance procedure was established for the first time, with the last step ending in final and binding arbitration.

According to nurses who were involved in the labor action, the struggle was necessary to establish basic rights and benefits for health care workers and women, but also for improving patient care. The short staffing and long working hours by nurses often were dangerous to patient care, and the contract provisions improved the working conditions of the nurses. Unlike unorganized hospital settings where nurses were often fired for speaking up in the patient's behalf, the nurses had "just cause" contract language that allowed them to become patient advocates. Most of the nurses in organized situations feel that this is the most valuable aspect of their membership.