

Vote no on the UNAC/UHCP sellout! Join the Kaiser Workers rank-and-file committee!

Kaiser Workers Rank-and-File Committee
20 November 2021

Nurses at Kaiser Permanente in Southern California met this weekend to found the Kaiser Workers Rank-and-File Committee and voted to approve the following founding statement. To join the committee, email Kaiserwrfc@gmail.com or text (213) 419-0737. Your name and contact information will not be shared publicly.

Join the Kaiser Rank and File Facebook group here.

Dear brothers and sisters at Kaiser Permanente, as well as workers across the world,

A week ago, 32,000 health care workers at Kaiser Permanente in Southern California were preparing to launch an historic strike against the hospital chain to demand significant wage increases and safe staffing levels. Confidence was high, and we were determined to fight to win back decades of concessions. Moreover, we were following with great excitement the growth of strikes across the country and around the world, including the strike by 10,000 workers at John Deere. We were determined to take our place in this growing international movement of the working class.

We are still determined. But we now know that we confront not only attacks by management but the unions which claim to represent us. The UNAC/UHCP (United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals) called off our strike at the last minute and announced a tentative agreement which it claimed was a “major victory.”

This is a lie, as everyone who has read the TA knows. Here is what it really contains:

- **Wage increases of only 2 and 3 percent.** This is below even the inadequate 4 percent demand which the unions had told us they were fighting for. Worse, it is below the current inflation rate of 6.2 percent. If they were honest, they would be telling us that this “victory” means real wage cuts of between 3 and 4 percent a year.

- **No provisions for safe staffing.** The new TA only promises to build yet another labor-management staffing committee. They already have these, and they do nothing but provide union officials with the chance to rub elbows with

management. Their real plans are to continue working us to the point of exhaustion. This is proven by the attendance bonus in the contract, which pressures us to work through illnesses instead of taking our allotted sick days.

- **Tens of millions of dollars in direct corporate funding to the unions.** According to the TA, Kaiser will fund the Labor Management Partnership (LMP) to the tune of no less than \$8 million per year and will hand another \$15 million to the Ben Hudnall Memorial Trust, a joint training program. No wonder the unions have declared “victory!”

- **Contract length extended to four years.** By lengthening the contract to four years instead of the usual three, Kaiser and the unions are trying to lock us into this subpar contract for as long as possible.

Nobody ever asked us what we thought about this deal before calling off the strike! What’s more, we’re still working without a contract. If there was any semblance of a democratic process, our 96 percent strike vote would have been honored, and we would be on strike right now, pushing for real wage increases and real staffing guarantees!

If the unions had only betrayed us, it would have been bad enough. But by shutting down our fight for adequate resources for hospitals and public health, they are endangering the lives of the public, at precisely the point when a new and massive winter surge of the coronavirus pandemic is underway.

Our strike could and should have been used to build a movement in the working class to fight for an elimination strategy for the pandemic. The growing number of strikes and the growth of the pandemic are completely connected. Everything workers are fighting for, whether it is workplace safety, wage increases above inflation or rational working hours, has been made immeasurably worse by policies motivated not by public health but Wall Street profits, which have allowed the virus to spread for two years.

The pandemic has made already inadequate staffing levels and poor working conditions immeasurably worse. Hospitals are once again overflowing in the US and internationally. Worldwide, 180,000 health care workers have already died,

and millions more are considering quitting their profession due to the stress and trauma. The longer the pandemic goes on, the worse the situation in the hospitals will become.

The sympathy strikes last week by tens of thousands of workers in the SEIU (Service Employees International Union) and the CNA (California Nurses Association) show the power we could wield if we were united. But no sooner did the unions launch the sympathy strikes than they sent workers back across the picket lines of 700 stationary and biomedical engineers in Northern California the following morning, forcing them to act as scabs against their own coworkers. There is no legitimate reason that these strikes should have lasted only 24 hours—they, and we, should all be on strike right now, honoring the engineers' picket lines.

What's more, the cancellation of our strike was the signal call for unions across the country to shut down struggles in other industries. The day our strike was supposed to begin, the IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) union "ratified" a contract for 60,000 film workers which the majority had voted down. Later in the week, the UAW (United Auto Workers), many of whose top officials are behind bars on corruption charges, shut down the strike at John Deere by making them re-vote on a contract they had already rejected.

Last week was supposed to be the beginning of a new stage across the country in the fight for better wages and working conditions. Instead, the unions enforced one betrayal after another. By acting in such a manner, they have made their loyalties clear. They are fighting on behalf of management and the corporations, not us.

This is why we, nurses and health care workers at Kaiser Permanente, are forming a new organization, the Kaiser Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The union ignores our demands, lies to us and tells us to accept what management is willing to give. We are a democratic organization controlled by workers ourselves, which fights to arm our coworkers with the truth and encourage them to fight until we have won all of our demands.

If they thought that by calling off the strike they would demoralize us, they were badly mistaken. The struggle is not over. It is only just beginning. Our first objective is to reject this sellout contract by the widest possible margin. We must begin to formulate our own demands and make clear what our "red line" is. We propose that nurses not accept any contract which does not contain the following:

- Adequate staffing levels must be set and enforced by nurses and health care workers themselves. The contract must have concrete and safe staffing ratios. In addition, there must be actual consequences set when safe staffing is not met during any given shift
- Annual 10 percent wage increases, together with cost-of-

living increases to protect against inflation

- The elimination of all wage and benefit tiers, with all workers brought to the top tier
- The enforcement of contractually mandated breaks
- The immediate disbandment of the Labor Management Partnership and the requisition of its funds for the purpose of distributing strike pay to every striking worker

After dragging out our strike vote for weeks, the unions are attempting to compress the time between the contract roll-out and the vote as much as possible. We must have double the length of time which has been allotted in order to allow all members the chance to read, question, discuss and make an informed vote on the contract. In addition, to ensure there is no vote-tampering, Kaiser nurses should organize rank-and-file observation teams at the voting places.

The Kaiser Workers Rank-and-File Committee will fight to build the widest possible lines of communication between Kaiser workers and other sections of the working class. In particular, we look forward to collaborating with our sister rank-and-file committees across the country and the world, including those at John Deere, Volvo Trucks and the many educators rank-and-file committees.

We propose that a central focus of this collaboration be the development of a campaign in the working class to fight for the elimination of the coronavirus pandemic. Let us band together to harness our growing movement to demand a change to finally bring the pandemic to an end, once and for all!



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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