

Support the #pizzaisnotworking walkouts by pharmacy workers! Trillions for public health, not pandemic profiteering!

World Socialist Web Site Health Care Workers Newsletter
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The *World Socialist Web Site Health Care Worker Newsletter* supports the walkout by pharmacists today at national chains throughout the United States against understaffing, overwork and unsafe working conditions during the coronavirus pandemic. We call on the entire working class to support the courageous initiative which the pharmacists have taken.

The walkouts today are part of a growing wave of opposition by the working class against intolerable working conditions made even worse by the criminal policies by the world's governments in response to the pandemic. Last week, health care workers in Turkey carried out a nationwide strike, declaring they have "run out of patience for health policies that favor business, not science, life and labor." In the United States, thousands of health care workers have carried out strike actions this year, in addition to key sections of industrial workers, including at John Deere, Volvo Trucks, and Kellogg's.

But the actions taken by pharmacists in the US are an early sign of a new phase in the growth of working-class resistance, driven by the deadly winter surge and the emergence of the hyper-infectious Omicron variant.

These walkouts are being organized by workers who are among the most critical but also underpaid frontline health care workers, who work in settings where tens of millions have received lifesaving vaccines. The popular #pizzaisnotworking hashtag behind this movement shows that they are sick and tired of being patronized by multimillionaire executives who "reward" them with pizza in the break rooms and the corporate press who praise them as "heroes," while pharmacy techs are made to subsist on poverty wages of \$17 an hour or less, which are being eroded even more by inflation.

Instead, they are demanding that real resources be appropriated to ensure adequate staffing and a decent standard of living.

The vast levels of overwork which they face create a dangerous environment for both themselves and the general public. In September, a CVS pharmacist in Indiana died of a heart attack after not being allowed to leave her shift when she experienced chest pains. In other cases, exhausted, overworked pharmacists have accidentally filled out the wrong prescriptions, causing serious and even fatal health complications.

Summing up the situation, one pharmacy tech at a Walgreens in California said: "My assistant manager cries at work because we are short of staff and she has to fill in as a technician and she can't do her store duties ... employees who have been with Walgreens 20 years are still making only \$15 an hour with no raises ... most of our coworkers have quit and the ones who are there have to work at least 14 hours a day at the same pay. All my coworkers and all departments are overworked and understaffed."

The world is now ending its second full year of the coronavirus pandemic, with no end in sight and the new Omicron variant rapidly spreading across the globe. This is entirely the product of government policies, pursued in countries around the world but above all in the United States, which are aimed at sacrificing human life in the name of protecting share values and profit margins.

While the federal government has injected trillions of dollars into Wall Street, it has removed whatever limited economic support was ever enacted for workers, forcing them back into unsafe workplaces and their children into unsafe schools in order to get them back

to work to pump out profits for the ultra-wealthy. The result has been that the wealth of US billionaires has increased by over 70 percent during the pandemic, even as more than 800,000 Americans have died.

This policy began under Trump but has continued seamlessly under Biden. Even with the emergence of the Omicron variant, itself made possible by allowing the virus to continue to spread and mutate, the entire political establishment says that nothing serious will be done and that workers must learn to “live” with the virus.

One of the most significant features of the movement by pharmacists is the fact that it is being organized independently of the trade unions. This reflects a growing rebellion by workers against these pro-corporate organization, which have spent the pandemic helping to keep workplaces and schools open and have worked shamelessly to betray one struggle after another and enforce substandard contracts.

In November, the health care unions at Kaiser Permanente canceled a strike of 32,000 nurses and health care workers at the last minute which had been authorized by a 96 percent vote. Instead, it brought forward a contract with wage increases below inflation, no resolution to understaffing and which even commits the unions to helping management find additional cost savings. In exchange, the unions will receive tens of millions in corporate cash through the Labor Management Partnership and other “joint” schemes.

In a highly opaque voting procedure marred by widespread censorship of opposition on social media, the unions declared the contract ratified, with the exception of 1,600 pharmacists in southern California who rejected it. The unions now intend to leave them on their own in the event of a possible strike, as they have for months for a strike by 700 stationary and biomedical engineers in northern California.

But these and similar betrayals have only served to discredit these bureaucratic, pro-capitalist organizations. They have failed to keep the growing movement of the working class in check, which continues to develop.

The growing rebellion against the unions finds its most organized form through a rapidly growing network of rank-and-file committees formed by workers themselves to oppose the unions’ betrayals, formulate workers’ own demands and appeal for

support and solidarity from the working class internationally. Such a committee was founded by Kaiser nurses and other health care workers in the course of their fight against the contract.

The next step in the pharmacists’ rebellion is to form rank-and-file committees of their own. The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on pharmacists across the country to contact us for assistance in building these organizations.

But this growing movement must develop into a broader fight to bring about a change in policy to finally end the coronavirus pandemic. Only the working class can fight to end the pandemic because it is not beholden to the profit interests which have blocked the measures necessary to end it. To arm the working class with the knowledge it needs, to explain the science of the virus, expose the horrific conditions to which workers are being subjected and expose those institutions and political and corporate figures responsible, the *World Socialist Web Site* has launched the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic. We call on pharmacists to participate and send in their own testimony about the conditions which they face.



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