

“We are creating a working class movement”: Striking Oakland teachers, Stanford nurses voice support for united struggle

Our reporters
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Around 2,000 teachers in the Oakland Unified School District took part in a one-day strike Friday against school closures and layoffs being planned by the district. Across the San Francisco Bay area, 5,000 Stanford Health Care and Packard nurses completed the fifth day of their open-ended strike. Five hundred Chevron oil refinery workers in nearby Richmond have also been on strike for over a month.

The coincidence of these three strikes shows the objective social power of the working class and the possibility of a united struggle of workers across the state, and around the world, in defense of their standard of living. The WSWS discussed this question with nurses and teachers Friday afternoon.

Jazmine, a striking teacher at Oakland Unified for Success Academy, spoke out in support of Stanford nurses and stated, “I want to say I am in full support of the nurses’ strike. I understand how we are connected as workers serving the public. And our people deserve a higher level and a higher standard of care across the board both in education and with their health.

“I know that as [COVID-19] cases continue to rise, nurses are expected to go into work even if they are experiencing symptoms and I think that is completely unfair. I see how we are connected in terms of how the district wants us to behave in the classroom is causing cases to go up. That is causing a stress on multiple facets of our society. I think it's unjust.

“I am 100 percent in support and I think we are creating a working class movement for people to feel inspired by and that's really important. I urge everyone who sees this to fight in whatever capacity that you can. Get plugged in and get involved. We are all connected here in the Bay Area, here in California, and we are

part of a rich history of people who have fought for what is ethical and what is right.”

Steven, a retired teacher from Life Academy in Oakland, California with 25 years of teaching experience, joined teachers on the picket line. “I support Stanford nurses,” he said. “We need to figure out a way to fight offensively. It is not enough to fight sporadically and separately. When there is critical mass it will happen. We’ve seen it happen in history.”

Margot, a teacher at Life Academy, said of the Stanford nurses strike: “Wow, how are you telling me there are not enough resources for workers who have been risking their lives every day of the pandemic? [Teachers] would love to support Stanford nurses. I didn’t even know they were on strike. We face the same tough conditions. Schools shouldn’t close! Nurses should get everything they need to do their job safely!”

A WSWS reporting team distributed roughly 250 leaflets to striking Stanford nurses yesterday, who responded enthusiastically to the call for a statewide strike. The Committee for the Recognition of Nursing Achievement (CRONA) union instead is attempting to corral nurses behind toothless appeals to the Democratic Party, which has presided over decades of austerity in the state. CRONA brought in Senator Alex Padilla to speak at the picket lines.

Isabella, a nurse at Stanford, said, “I am striking because of my personal experience. You see people need mental health support. We are highly skilled nurses and a lot of our job that we are doing is while we are understaffed. With COVID, things were especially hard but this job has always been hard.’

Referencing the recent on-the-job suicide of a local

nurse at Kaiser, Isabella continued, “I am a nurse, but still my heart goes out to nurses. I saw the news today about the suicide [of a nurse] in Santa Clara. It shows how hard things are in this job.

“They [the administration of the hospital] are cutting our healthcare. If they really cared about us they wouldn’t do that. They would listen to us instead of threaten us.

“We are struggling. Nurses already live far away and can’t live closer to the hospital. We are asking for decent wages.

“I am showing up here, and supporting my team. We started this and we need to be here until it is finished. We are asking for what we deserve.”

After some discussion about how nurses are supporting themselves during the strike, for which CRONA is distributing no strike pay, Isabella’s coworker added, “We are staying united, but it is hard. I know a lot of people are taking temp jobs or working part time to support themselves during the strike.”

Taylor, a nurse at Stanford with seven years, told the WSWS, “We are demanding more time with our kids and the ability to have a work, life balance. We need more vacation and better mental health support.

“I do not work in a COVID unit, but we were still impacted by the pandemic. They canceled elective surgeries at first, but as soon as they could do them again we were swamped.

“Now the hospital is canceling our healthcare. This is the healthcare that my kids are on.”

Asked if she had a message to other nurses who are working without contracts or those set to expire soon, she stated, “Feel empowered! There is strength in numbers.”

Lisa, a nurse in the Good Samaritan hospital system, explained why she was picketing in solidarity with Stanford and Packard nurses: “I really support what they are doing here. Nursing is challenging and it has an extremely high turnover, if you want to keep nurses you need to increase wages and give us all respect.

“The health and conditions for nurses means that we can treat patients better.

“I believe that this strike could help the rest of us in the Bay Area. The contract at Good Sam [the nickname for Good Samaritan] will end soon. We need to send a message of solidarity to each other and that we support each other.”

A Kaiser San Diego nurse told WSWS, ‘I support the Stanford nurses who are fighting for lower patient ratios. These are important to all healthcare workers because without them we run the risk of making critical errors because we are so exhausted.’ She emphasized that this is the central question in the RaDonda Vaught case, in which a Tennessee nurse was criminally convicted for a medication mistake, noting, “It’s absolutely terrible she is liable for a systematic error while the hospital was not held to account at all. Without lower staff-to patient-ratios, as well as not being able to take much needed rest periods/ break times, there will always be the possibility of making errors when it pertains to patient care.”

Last fall, Kaiser Permanente worked in concert with the California Nurses Association, UNAC/UHCP (United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals), the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE), and several other unions to push through deeply concessionary contracts on tens of thousands of Kaiser workers across the West Coast. The unions called off mass strikes at the last minute.

A maintenance worker from the same hospital also expressed solidarity with Stanford and Packard nurses: ‘I agree with the nurses’ strike. They are just trying to provide a better service for their patients. I think it’s pretty obvious that everyone can agree that we want to be treated with the best service at a hospital. I think the hospital trying to rob them of their benefits is wrong. I encourage them to keep fighting so that they can provide the best service for their patients.’

These statements highlight the fact that nurses and educators want to unite with each other and with other workers as well. We call on nurses, educators, and oil workers to exchange contact information and build networks of rank-and-file committees, independent of and hostile to the conservative trade unions, the Democrats, and the Republicans.

The WSWS stands ready to support nurses, educators, and oil workers who would like to build rank-and-file committees.



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