

Vote NO on the CKPU sellout! Kaiser workers must see the full contract!

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The WSWs Health Care Workers Newsletter is urging Kaiser workers to **vote “NO”** on the contract being brought to a vote by the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions (CKPU). The CKPU released only “highlights” of the deal, even though voting has begun today and continues through November 3.

Undoubtedly in response to demands from the rank-and-file to see the tentative agreement in full, the CKPU added the following statement on their website: “Full package of Tentative Agreements (TA’s) and TA summaries will be available for review at the voting locations.” But if the TA is as strong as the CKPU claims, then there is no reason why the Kaiser workers should not have already received a copy with ample time to study it.

A TA is not something that can be skimmed right before a vote. The 2019 contract was 159 pages. Kaiser workers must demand to have a full week to read the contract carefully, to discuss with coworkers and make an educated decision on how they will vote. Absent this basic democratic criterion, any vote held should be considered illegitimate and invalid. Kaiser workers must reject the contract on principle for this reason.

In opposition to the sellout by the CKPU bureaucrats, Kaiser workers must build a rank-and-file committee, composed of and led by Kaiser workers themselves. This is the only way to take control of this struggle, to stand together and call for the largest possible “No” vote.

Even the “highlights” that have been made available also make clear that the Kaiser workers are being sold out. They include:

No provisions for safe staffing. On the picket lines, Kaiser workers made clear: staffing was their main demand, to deal with unsustainable workloads. But the highlights only note that Kaiser will hold mass hiring

events, which commits Kaiser to nothing.

Wage increases which don’t keep pace with inflation. Wage increases will total 21 percent over the course of the four-year contract. This includes 6 percent the first year and 5 percent in the second, third and fourth years of the contract.

In the first place, this “victory” is a walkback from earlier proposals from the CKPU of 7,7, 6.25 and 6.25 percent wage increases, which would themselves have been inadequate. It also does not come close to what workers need to make up for years of declining wages and soaring inflation.

For a California worker making \$25 an hour and working full time, a wage increase of 6, 5, 5, 5 percent over four years would mean an average of \$2,520 more per year. But many Kaiser facilities are located in ultra-expensive areas where average rent is around \$3,000 to \$4,000, meaning such increases would be a drop in the bucket.

Starting wages for California workers at \$25 an hour—the new state minimum—and \$23 an hour outside of California . The CKPU claims to have won this new starting wage in California, but in reality it is just the new minimum wage set for healthcare workers in California by a bill slated to be signed by Governor Gavin Newsom.

Millions of dollars in direct corporate funding to the unions.

The “highlights” makes clear that Kaiser will continue funding the union bureaucracy through the Labor Management Partnership and other “joint” programs. While details are scanty, highlights state that Kaiser will increase payments to an “Education Fund” by 40 percent. In addition, highlights state that Kaiser will invest an additional \$100 million into a company called “Futuro Health”. Kaiser is one of the main

investors of this company with SEIU-UHW president, and David Reagan sitting on its board.

These are in effect legal bribes used to line the bureaucracy's pockets in exchange for sellouts. Similar "joint" programs were at the center of the recent scandal in the United Auto Workers, which brought down more than a dozen top officials

The CKPU vaguely claims the contract also contains "A full menu of initiatives to invest in the workforce and address the short-staffing crisis" and "much, much more." The CKPU is expecting Kaiser workers to believe that the contract contains a treasure trove of riches that for some reason can't be put in the highlights. But even what has made its way into the highlights, which are meant to present the contract in the best possible light, make clear that this is a sellout.

The contract and the manner in which they are attempting to ram it through is a betrayal of this month's strike by 75,000 Kaiser workers, the largest in the history of American healthcare. Workers voted to authorize a strike by 98 percent because they were determined to fight back against unsafe and worsening conditions, greatly exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. But the bureaucrats did everything they could to isolate and limit that strike, including by limiting it in advance to three days, and not paying workers a cent of strike pay.

If this strike had not been limited to three days, Kaiser workers could have pushed for real wage increases and staffing guarantees. Instead, Kaiser workers were forced back to work without a contract while a deal was worked out behind their back in collusion with the Biden Administration, including acting Labor Secretary Julie Su, who played a key role in the sellout of the dockworkers earlier this year.

Under pressure from Kaiser and Biden Administration, the CKPU wants to wrap up this struggle as quickly as possible. The bureaucrats and the ruling class are aware of the explosive potential of the 75,000 strong Kaiser workforce and must keep it from joining the growing eruption of the class struggle.

The bureaucrats want to prevent Kaiser workers from joining a growing global movement of the working class, which includes a strike by 1,700 nurses in New Jersey, Walgreens pharmacy workers across the country, and a strike vote by Kaiser pharmacy workers in Oregon and Washington. Mass protests are also

building in the working class across the world against the genocidal assault on the Gaza Strip by the Israeli government, which has the full backing of Washington and its European allies.

Kaiser workers must continue their fight by combining the widest possible rejection of this contract with a turn out to the working class across the US and the world. The fight of Kaiser workers is also a fight for the public whose lives are endangered by unsafe staffing and the lack of adequate resources. As the SARS-CoV-2 virus continues to mutate and spread, and the tripledemic threat of Covid, RSV and flu threaten to fill hospitals to capacity, healthcare workers are calling out for a complete overhaul of the healthcare system and the removal of profit from the medical system.

It is the rank-and-file workers themselves who must play the decisive role in organizing opposition and resistance in this struggle. Workers must organize rank-and-file committees to take control of their struggle, demand the full release of the TA and return to the picket lines if the contract does not meet their demands.

These committees would also allow workers to communicate with Kaiser workers across different unions and even other hospital systems, sharing information and broadening their strike across other health systems and industry. For assistance in forming a rank-and-file committee, fill out the form below.



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