

# “It’s impossible to live in California on these wages”: Healthcare workers on 5-day strike at West Anaheim Medical Center

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On May 26, 2025, 163 healthcare workers at Prime Healthcare’s West Anaheim Medical Center, members of the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW), launched a five-day strike in Anaheim, California. Workers are fighting intertwined crises of collapsing public health, corporate profiteering and rising living costs in southern California.

The strikers include respiratory therapists, licensed vocational nurses, surgical technicians and imaging technologists—many of whom have endured nearly eight months without a contract. West Anaheim’s workers face conditions emblematic of the collapse of the U.S. healthcare system: understaffing and a crumbling standard of care.

your family. I have two little kids. Everything costs so much. It’s so crazy. And no, we are not getting strike pay.”

In 2023, turnover among licensed vocational nurses and medical technicians at West Anaheim hit 41 percent—more than double the national average. That exodus has had consequences: 190 patient complaints and 52 state-cited deficiencies over the past two years alone.

Meanwhile, Prime Healthcare reported \$56 million in net profit from 2021 to 2023. None of this has gone to staffing or improving care. Instead, its latest contract proposal offers just a 3 percent annual raise—insultingly below inflation and far less than the wage scales at nearby hospitals like Keck-USC, where salaries are about 30 percent higher.

## “It’s impossible to live in California on these wages”

Mary, an ultrasound technician and diagnostic medical sonographer who has worked at the hospital for three years, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

“The turnover rate is really high because the wages are not competitive,” she said. “Our workload is on the heavier side compared to our sister hospitals. With our wages not being competitive, many employees leave fast. They go to other hospitals.

“Here the starting wage in my field is in the \$30 to \$34 range. At other hospitals, it’s in the \$40s and \$50s. My wage compared to other hospitals is like \$20 less. So we are really underpaid.

“It’s impossible to live in California on these wages. It’s very hard. It’s hard to come in here taking care of patients, and then you have to go home to take care of

## The union’s legal straitjacket and political complicity

The union’s counterproposal—a 17 percent raise over four years—is also inadequate. Worse still, the NUHW has limited this strike to an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charge, effectively limiting workers from raising demands on wages and other economic issues.

The union officials are enmeshed in a corrupt labor-management framework. In May 2025, NUHW settled a historic 196-day strike by Southern California Kaiser mental health workers—only to deliver a contract that left core demands unmet: caseload limits, pay equity, and even basic staffing protections.

This repeats a long pattern. In 2022, NUHW’s 10-week strike similarly left staffing problems and COVID-19 protections unaddressed. In 2015, the union agreed to

Kaiser's two-tier pension scheme that slashed retirement benefits for Southern California workers. Again and again, NUHW has acted as a buffer—keeping angry workers from threatening the system it helps manage.

### **“I’m disgusted with the whole thing”**

Ian, an X-ray technologist with 18 years at the hospital, described the dismal state of healthcare and the corrosive role of politics.

“The company is making plenty of money,” he said. “The other Prime Healthcare hospitals in Orange County are La Palma, Garden Grove, and Huntington Beach. They’re all across the country—50+ hospitals. They just bought eight more.”

The area West Anaheim serves is deeply underserved. “This area is very low income. We have a lot of homeless we take care of. Unfortunately, a lot of drug addiction. It’s a dangerous time to be an addict the way things are with fentanyl.”

He also criticized the political system as a whole: “I’m against war. I’m for free education and healthcare for everybody. We’ve always got money for wars but no money for healthcare. ... On the national level, I’m disgusted with the whole thing.” The Democrats and Republicans were really just “a uniparty,” he said.

Like so many healthcare workers, Ian still carries trauma from the pandemic.

“During the COVID lockdown, I wasn’t on lockdown. I came to work every day. I think I have PTSD. I saw a lot of people die. ... One of my co-workers died on Christmas Eve with 24 other people. I hope I never go through that again.”

### **The Democratic Party, the union bureaucracy and the betrayal of healthcare workers**

The bipartisan dismantling of public health has opened the door for fascistic elements to flourish. The Trump administration has appointed figures like Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has pushed anti-vaccine lies and rescinded federal COVID-19 vaccination recommendations. Moreover, the Trump administration’s

draconian attacks on immigrants have struck a nerve among these workers, where a large majority comes from immigrant families.

The NUHW’s public posturing—as a “Sanctuary Union” defending workers from Trump’s anti-immigrant attacks—rings hollow. In practice, the union is tightly bound to the Democratic Party, which under Biden and Obama has overseen deportations, Medicaid rollbacks, and the ongoing gutting of public health.

While the NUHW labels anti-union actions “Trumpian,” it continues to support a party that funds war and privatization over healthcare and wages.

The union bureaucracy is also in bed with management. Its partnership with Kaiser Permanente, for example, funnels tens of millions into the “Labor-Management Partnership” programs aimed at suppressing strikes and disciplining workers. The result has been mass burnout, unsafe clinics, and a workforce ground down just as Long COVID and new variants strain the system.

The fight at West Anaheim requires healthcare workers to break out of the confines of NUHW bureaucrats and build independent rank-and-file committees—democratic bodies that serve the interests of workers, not union staff or political parties.

These committees must push for immediate wage increases that reflect cost of living, full staffing and safe patient ratios, pension and benefit equality across regions and industry-wide action and coordination across all Prime Healthcare sites and beyond.

More importantly, these committees must prepare for a political confrontation with the Trump administration, which is systematically dismantling public health as part of its program of dictatorship on behalf of the corporate oligarchy. Only through such unity and independent organization can healthcare workers begin to reverse decades of austerity and exploitation.



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