

# Tens of thousands of Kaiser Permanente healthcare workers to vote for strike

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*Healthcare workers: Build a workers' movement for public health and against dictatorship! For information about rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.*

Around 32,000 Kaiser Permanente healthcare workers, including registered nurses, pharmacists, physical/occupational therapists and optometrists, are voting this week to authorize strike action once their contract expires on September 30. The workers in California and Hawaii, members of the United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals (UNAC/UHCP), are under a wider contract involving over 60,000 people in the Alliance of Health Care Unions.

The vote comes a week after 600 midwives and anesthesiologists conducted a one-day strike at Kaiser facilities in Northern California. The strike involved workers from over 20 facilities, although picketing was held only at the Oakland and Roseville locations.

The strikers were joined by a roughly equal number of “sympathy strikers,” including physician assistants (PAs) and acupuncturists. While they are members of the UNAC/UHCP, they are governed by a separate bargaining framework. They voted to join in 2023-2024 and are still working without a contract.

Handmade pickets at the Oakland facility last Monday accused KP of “Bad-faith bargaining” and declared, “Stop profits over babies and families!”; “Safe staffing for patients and providers!”; and “Expert care under attack!”

WSWS reporters spoke with workers at KP in Oakland on Friday. “I think all the workers should come together and do a physical, all-union strike,” one worker said. “I don’t think it’s enough communication from union officials because I didn’t even know they were going to be striking the other day. I didn’t even know until I came to work.”

“We have no information,” he said. “Information needs to be spread for every union ... That’s simple. The transporters, the receivers, all the people that you don’t really know about, they need to be heard. It’s one of the most important jobs people don’t ever hear about it. It’s always about the doctors and the nurses, and maybe the pharmacists, but it’s

the little people that make this thing run.”

This is a small reflection of the enormous determination of the Kaiser workers to fight for decent wages, safe staffing ratios and other key demands. But workers are also fighting in defense of healthcare against an entrenched financial oligarchy which is slashing jobs and benefits, and imposing brutal working conditions all over the country.

Moreover, the strike deadline looms as the Trump administration is actively attempting to set up a dictatorship, including preparing to send troops into major American cities. (Los Angeles, where many of the Kaiser workers are based, has already seen troop deployments over the summer). This, in turn, is deeply connected with the attack on science, including the promotion of anti-vaccine quackery by HHS Secretary Robert F Kennedy and other Trump officials.

A strike by Kaiser nurses would be a major step in creating the conditions for a movement of the working class against fascism and corporate oligarchy. It would send a powerful signal to workers everywhere, including tens of thousands of public educators in virtually every major city in California, who are working without a contract.

It would inevitably raise questions about inequality and the structure of capitalist society, and threaten to develop not only into a fight against Trump but against his enablers in the Democratic Party, who also control the state of California.

But for this to take place, Kaiser workers must also prepare a fight against the union bureaucracy. The bureaucrats at UNAC/UHCP and other major unions are determined to prevent any open opposition from below that could threaten their close relations with management and the political establishment.

At Kaiser, this incestuous relationship is codified in the Labor Management Partnership, which is funded with tens of millions in Kaiser money. The LMP was founded explicitly to prevent strikes and to facilitate “cooperation” between the bureaucrats and Kaiser administrators.

This has led to one sellout after another. The longest

mental health worker strike in United States history ended this May with the betrayal of a Kaiser strike in Southern California, with workers failing to achieve their primary demand for better staffing after seven months of union-imposed isolation.

In 2021, over 96 percent of over 32,000 KP workers, most of whom are in the UNAC/UHCP, voted to launch an indefinite strike in relation to the previous version of the contract. The unions called off the strike just before it was scheduled to begin, announcing an agreement which quickly proved to be a major sellout.

This bitter accumulated experience has produced deep distrust for union officials. Innumerable Facebook comments in response to union posts combined a determination to strike with frustration and anger at the bureaucracy.

“If we really want these things we **NEED TO STRIKE!!**...Let’s all be honest KP is never interested in fair pay and honesty and will shirk contract language whenever possible.” Another wrote: “Looks like we are going to get another terrible contract. No clue why they continue to go down with wages.” Wrote another: “Alliance, if we all do agree to strike, don’t **GIVE IN** like last time one minute prior to calling a strike. Don’t be weak!!!”

The critical issue is the development of a rebellion to end the stranglehold of the bureaucrats and develop new forms through which workers can organize their own strength independently. The iron rule is: as long as the bureaucrats retain control over a struggle, a sellout is the only possible outcome.

Aware of the deep distrust, many unions in the past several years have launched “strike ready” campaigns, which are, in fact, designed to head off strikes. The latest example of this was in Philadelphia, where the teachers union crammed through a contract after weeks of sign-making events, rallies and other empty shows of preparing to fight. Only weeks after the contract’s approval, the school district is now preparing massive school closures to cut a more than \$300 million deficit. The same maneuver was pulled over the summer by the Chicago Teachers Union.

Another bait-and-switch is in progress by the California Teachers Association. Their “strike ready” campaign is, ironically, titled “We Can’t Wait,” even though the CTA is making teachers wait weeks after the school year began, and with no strike plan in sight.

The critical question at Kaiser and every other workplace is the creation of rank-and-file committees. These new structures, independent from union officials, will develop the means to maximize workers’ initiative, enforce their democratic will to strike and prepare the ground for a broader fight, combining the defense of healthcare with a powerful movement in the working class against capitalist

oligarchy. Such a committee had been initially founded in the fight against the 2021 sellout contract.

Key demands for a Kaiser rank-and-file committee today would include:

- An immediate strike at the expiration of the contract on September 30 if a new deal is not in place which meets all of workers’ demands, including inflation-busting pay increases and meaningful enforcement of safe-staffing ratios, which Kaiser and other hospital chains presently flout at will;

- All bargaining sessions must be open to the public and livestreamed, with rank-and-file representatives on hands to enforce nurses’ demands and override any unauthorized concessions to management;

- Rank-and-file control over picketing, including preventing Kaiser from using scab labor, and sending “flying pickets” to hospitals, schools and workplaces to appeal for wider support;

- Measures to protect co-workers and patients from attacks by ICE and other government agencies being used by Trump to terrify and crush resistance;

- The defense of vaccine and public health science, including the reinstatement of all vaccine mandates and the provision of COVID vaccines and other vaccines at no cost to the public, and;

- The expropriation of the healthcare conglomerates, which make billions through price-gouging and denial of care. Their resources must be used to create a high-quality public healthcare system, under workers’ control, to end needless suffering and death created by subordinating lives to profit.



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