

# 46,000 Kaiser workers set to walk out October 14: Build rank-and-file committees to transform strike into battle for public health and democracy

WSWS Healthcare Worker Newsletter

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*The following is an open letter from the WSWS Healthcare Worker Newsletter to the nearly 46,000 Kaiser Permanente nurses and other healthcare professionals who are set to strike across California, Oregon and Hawaii on October 14. To join the fight to build the Kaiser Workers Rank-and-File Committee, fill out the form at the end of this article.*

Dear Kaiser Workers,

Your vote to strike on October 14 is a powerful expression of opposition to intolerable conditions. It must be met with the broadest possible support from workers across the country. The issues you face—unsafe staffing, sub-inflation pay raises and relentless overwork—are universal and unsustainable. They have driven a mass exodus from healthcare and threaten the survival of both patients and workers.

This fight, however, cannot be separated from the broader crisis confronting the entire working class. The Trump administration has already deployed troops to major American cities, tested mass repression in Portland and Chicago and is preparing to invoke the Insurrection Act to impose martial law. These actions form part of a deliberate conspiracy to establish a fascist dictatorship, abolish democratic rights and crush the resistance of the working class through military force.

A critical part of this political offensive is a war against science and public health. The oligarchy's aim is not to preserve life but to shorten it. By driving down life expectancy—through mass infection, chronic disease, poverty and the collapse of healthcare—the ruling class seeks to reduce spending on Social Security, Medicare and other entitlement programs, freeing trillions for corporate profits, tax cuts and war. The same criminal policy underlies the dismantling of hospitals, the ending of pandemic protections and the “normalization” of death on a mass scale.

The strike by 46,000 Kaiser workers has the potential to become a catalyst for a far broader mobilization of the working class against dictatorship and social inequality. It can unite workers across industries to defend their most fundamental democratic and social rights, including the right to high-quality, free healthcare for all.

The Alliance of Health Care Unions (AHCU) bureaucracy intends to limit the strike to five days or block it altogether as it did in 2021, when it called off the walkout at the last moment. That betrayal produced a sellout contract with unenforceable “staffing ratio” language and no mechanisms for workers to defend themselves. The Kaiser Workers Rank-and-File Committee opposed the 2021 sellout and must now be expanded to transfer power from the union apparatus to the healthcare workers on the hospital and clinic floors. Only through the formation and strengthening of such committees can workers take control of this struggle into their own hands and wage it to victory.

**The WSWS Healthcare Workers Newsletter advances the following program for Kaiser workers:**

- **Enforce the democratic decision to strike.** No last-minute cancellations!
- **Fight for an open-ended, indefinite strike** until all demands are won.
  - **Organize flying pickets** to schools, docks and major workplaces to win mass support.
  - **Set staffing ratios by workers themselves**, not management or bureaucrats.
  - **Defend immigrant workers and patients.** Form committees to stop ICE from entering hospitals.
  - **Demand inflation-busting raises** so workers can live near their jobs.
  - **Impose limits on overtime** to end burnout and ensure safe, high-quality care.
  - **Guarantee free vaccination and COVID-19 protections** for all patients and staff.
  - **Reinstate infection-control protocols** and universal testing upon admission.
  - **Redirect Kaiser's billions in profit** toward medical care and wage increases.

Kaiser workers are not engaged in a merely economic struggle but a political one. The methods Trump is now using against immigrant workers—mass repression, kidnappings and deportations to concentration camps—will be turned against striking workers and all workers and youth who oppose the demands of the oligarchy.

The Kaiser Rank-and-File Committee can serve as the nucleus for uniting 46,000 Kaiser workers with millions of other workers across the United States to prepare mass, collective action, including a general strike, to drive Trump and his fascist cabal from power and defend the democratic and social rights of the working class.

This is a fight against the capitalist system and both corporate-controlled parties that defend it.

Hospitals have been transformed into profit-making enterprises for investors. Administrators and financiers treat the suffering and deaths of patients as the cost of doing business while reaping billions in profits—Even in the early days of the pandemic, they looted public aid through the CARES Act.

Kaiser’s “nonprofit” status is a fraud. It tripled its net income to \$12.9 billion last year, with total assets of \$74.1 billion. Management and the union bureaucracy justify austerity, while healthcare workers endure short staffing, lack of supplies and mandatory overtime. Inflation and falling real wages are forcing many to rely on overtime and long commutes simply to survive.

The Trump administration is using the ongoing government shutdown to escalate its drive toward authoritarian rule. It plans to permanently fire hundreds of thousands of federal workers, gut Social Security Disability Insurance and deepen unprecedented cuts to Medicaid through Trump’s “One Big Beautiful Bill.” These measures will devastate hospitals, push millions deeper into poverty and accelerate the dismantling of public healthcare.

Yet the Democratic Party has mounted no serious opposition. Congressional Democrats are appealing to Trump and the Republicans for a bipartisan “deal” to reopen the government while refusing to raise any demand to oppose Trump’s moves toward dictatorship. California Governor Gavin Newsom, for all his rhetorical criticisms of martial law plans, offers nothing but appeals to the courts—appeals that Trump openly disregards.

The Democrats and their allies in the trade union bureaucracy fear a mass movement of the working class against Trump far more than they fear dictatorship itself, because such a movement would threaten the very capitalist order they defend. They, like the Republicans, represent the same corporate and financial oligarchy that profits from war, austerity and the destruction of healthcare.

The destruction of public health is central to this fascistic agenda. Trump’s political allies, including Robert F. Kennedy Jr., are spearheading attacks on science—blocking vaccination programs, spreading lies about childhood vaccines and reviving anti-scientific myths, such as the claim that Tylenol causes autism. The ruling elite recognizes that genuine public health policy threatens its class interests, since profits depend on cutting care and driving up mortality. During the pandemic, more than 100,000 healthcare workers were sacrificed to this policy of social murder.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues today because both the big business politicians in both parties, including the Biden-Harris administration, sacrificed human life for corporate profit. New and

more infectious variants are spreading through hospitals and communities, while the government and media conceal data, end testing, and dismantle all protections.

As healthcare workers confront ongoing outbreaks without PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), ventilation upgrades or isolation procedures, the same resources once promised for “pandemic preparedness” are being funneled into war and repression. The connection between the destruction of healthcare and the buildup of a police state could not be clearer.

Kaiser workers must unite with workers across all industries to intervene in this crisis through mass struggle. It is highly significant that the strike is set to end the day after the second “No Kings” protest on October 18, when millions are expected to march against authoritarianism. In June, between 5 to 11 million workers and youth joined the first “No Kings” demonstrations.

Unifying the fight of Kaiser workers with the growing opposition to dictatorship is exactly what is needed. If Kaiser workers take control of this struggle, defy the sabotage of the union bureaucracy and wage a determined struggle to win their demands, they can unite with the millions of workers and young people opposing the genocide in Gaza, fascism, high living costs and social inequality.

This movement must be politically independent of both capitalist parties and unite black, white and immigrant workers in the US with their class brothers and sisters internationally. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) will assist Kaiser workers to coordinate their struggles with healthcare workers in Canada, Mexico and across the world.

The fight for safe and affordable healthcare is inseparable from the fight against capitalism itself, which subordinates every aspect of social life to profit. In defending healthcare, Kaiser workers are defending the right to life for the entire working class.

**There is no time to lose.** To join and build the Kaiser Workers Rank-and-File Committee and take up this fight, fill out the form below.



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