

“Our patients are afraid to come to their treatment because of the ICE raids.”

## Kaiser nurses speak out from the picket on last day of strike set to coincide with the “No Kings” protests

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The ongoing strike of 46,000 healthcare workers at Kaiser Permanente continued into its fourth day on Friday throughout California, Oregon, Washington and Hawaii.

The strike is part of a growing opposition among workers to social conditions. The last full day of the five-day strike will coincide with the “No Kings” protests on Saturday, which are expected to draw out millions of workers and youth across the United States.

The situation is urgent. Numerous Republicans have deemed Saturday’s protests as the “hate America rally,” and claimed demonstrators as “terrorists,” while the Trump White House is reportedly deep in discussion about invoking the Insurrection Act, essentially imposing martial law in parts of the country.

The Kaiser strike poses the need for the working class to take the lead in the fight against Trump’s dictatorship, which is carrying out massive attacks on public health.

The Socialist Equality Party released a statement in advance of the protests, which declared:

[We call] for the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, factory and neighborhood to coordinate this struggle. These committees must unite every section of the working class—teachers and nurses, auto and logistics workers, public employees, youth and students—into a single, powerful movement. They must become the foundation for a counteroffensive linking the defense of democratic rights to the fight for jobs, wages, healthcare and social equality.

On Friday the WSWS spoke to healthcare workers on the picket lines in Los Angeles and San Diego.

**“A lot of our patients are afraid to come to their treatment because of the ICE raids.”**

**Carolina and Jessica**, oncology nurses at the Downey Kaiser Permanente hospital, spoke to the WSWS.

Carolina said, “The Trump administration’s ending of cancer research will definitely affect us. Because of the Trump administration, many people will not get the kind of services they need.”

“Many people don’t have jobs. How can they take care of their health?... So what that means is they could potentially die. Most of our patients—not the majority, but some of them could potentially die.”

“Many of our patients find it absolutely devastating. So having an extra year or even two years to spend time with their families, to get their affairs in order, and to say their goodbyes is crucial. That’s what worries me most about my patients.”

“When people don’t have healthcare, that’s what worries my patients, when they lack coverage. So this administration has definitely impacted us. I’ve had patients sitting in my chair, concerned and they’re on their last chemo treatment. And they tell me, ‘Now that cancer research is defunded, I don’t think there’s hope for me anymore.’ And this cancer treatment is working.”

“And that’s really sad, but that’s our reality as oncology nurses. We have patients who we see one month and then we don’t see them the next month. We don’t know if it’s because they’ve passed away or because they no longer have insurance.”

Jessica added, “And a lot of them are afraid to come to their treatment because of the ICE raids. They wouldn’t come for their treatments because they thought they’d be picked up by ICE at the hospital. It affected a lot of people. Some of them wouldn’t show up for a while. Even family members stopped coming to the appointments. They only know that the ICE agents are showing up at the clinics.”

Carolina said, “We were told that if ICE comes onto the premises, we don’t say anything to them. We don’t have to engage. If ICE comes to the clinics, our director or our assistant director talks with them to take care of it.”

“If we are in that situation, obviously, as registered nurses we want to protect our patients and ourselves.”

Jessica said, “We’re here also because the cost of living has gone up. Yes, we do earn a good salary, but our expenses are also high because we paid for our education and studied hard to earn good money, so our costs are higher.”

Carolina said, “I mean, we’re all affected. I’ve seen some stuff on TikTok and social media that say, ‘You nurses make a lot of money.’

What about how much the Kaiser CEO is making?"

"But it's the nurses who are risking our lives and our licenses for the hospital when we're understaffed and we don't have enough nurses, and we have to rush things to get all the patients through.

Jessica said, "And because of the Medicare cuts, they're trying to fit more patients in. So we get more patients and that means they're taking away from the patients the time that we need to make proper assessments, etc. Basically, it's like in and out, in and out, like they're cattle."

Carolina said, "We have to put our licenses on the line. Because we have to accommodate management, but the bottom line—and I know this is the consensus for a lot of the nurses I work with—is putting patients first. So we might get a slap on the hand. 'Well, why was this patient an hour late?' We care about the patients. For all the nurses I work with, it's the patients first. We need to have the control in our hands."

On the broader political situation, Carolina said, "You know, I'm a Democrat. But I am so disappointed in the Democrats. At this point in time, whether you're a Democrat, a Republican or an independent, it doesn't matter. What matters is we do the right thing. It's about good and evil. It's about coming together as people in combating what's going on with this administration, if it's immigration, if it's dictatorship. I mean this is how we're going to get this solved. It's been like this in the past. That's how dictatorships were overthrown, by the people coming together.

"We're no longer part of the World Health Organization because there's too much education going on. It's better to dumbify the people. If you take that away in other countries, nobody knows what's going on. If he says if I inject bleach in you, it's going to work, then a lot of people, not the majority of Americans, but there's going to be a small percentage that believes that, they're going to lose their lives because of something that wasn't true. And it wasn't proven. And that's sickening!"

#### **"We have no choice but to leave because our bodies are breaking"**

Two primary care nurses, **Sylvia and Maria**, spoke to WSWS reporters outside the Kaiser Claremont Mesa Facility in San Diego.

"The short staffing is really affecting us, instead of seven nurses, there's three, or four and it doesn't feel safe," said Sylvia.

Maria added that "We're always getting distracted on our workflow and we get pulled in different directions because we are missing ancillary staff to help us, so all this keeps adding to the nurse's plate."

Maria added, "We came from the hospital where conditions are worse than in the ambulatory setting. I come from DOU, which is a step down unit from ICU. It's really hard. They keep pulling our CNAs so we have no support to take care of patients. And on top of that, we have critical patients to take care of. Sometimes we have to transport our own patients because there's no transport staff. At nighttime, I work night shift. We have no lift teams that help us join our patients, so we have to make do with what we have.

"And so a lot of our coworkers have had injuries. Even though I love taking care of patients at the hospital we have no choice but to leave because our bodies are breaking.

"If a patient is soiled, you're by yourself and you can't find any help because they're also busy because we have no CNAs. Then when you have an injury, management asks you, 'what could you have done differently?' It's blamed on us. It's never blamed on staffing or how they provide no help. It's the nurses that are scapegoated.

On the broader attacks against public health and vaccines by the Trump administration, Sylvia noted, "It makes this more difficult for us when

patients are un-trusting or they just don't believe the researchers. It's not fair for us who are the ones working with patients and we need to try to undo a lot of the misinformation." She added that while billions are being spent on wars abroad, the growth of the financial elite, "I feel for the people that don't have health insurance for giving away millions of people here are dying without help."

Recalling the last contract in 2021, when the unions called off a strike at the last minute to rush through a substandard contract, she added: "In 2021 we were geared up for a strike, and then all of a sudden it was 8am and we get a text message calling it off. We still don't know what happened and we felt like our national leaders sold us out at that time."

#### **"I work two jobs, two different locations, just to be able to pay rent."**

**John** is an Urgent Care and ER Nurse at Kaiser San Diego.

He told WSWS reporters, "Kaiser is consistently asking for more from us and it's continually adding more to our plate. We continue to lose because of whether it be burnout or whether it be like for myself, I work two jobs. I work two jobs, two different locations, just to be able to pay rent. "

"And it's not only about the patient care aspect, it's what they're asking nurses to do, along with not getting a raise, not getting any more help. Because of the burnout, we've lost many different LPNs, many different nurses who've gone to other places... And even though we've lost nurses, they won't hire more. So now we're carrying the load of others, and they still won't hire. The strike is not just about paychecks for many. And I don't think it's about that necessarily. I think it's more about that we just need so much help.

"In the Kaiser urgent care that I'm at, every year we see on average about 150 to 170 patients a day, which is normal, but over the past two years we've seen over 200 every single day. So the numbers are slowly increasing and we're still not getting any help."

"Meanwhile corporate profits are at record highs, and with inflation, they're making record profits charging patients for more and they're leaving here, paying thousands or millions of dollars. Look at pediatric patients, or NICU patients, who leave and get discharged owing \$6 million."

Kaiser workers are not only engaged in an economic struggle but a political one. As a statement by the WSWS *Healthcare Newsletter* warned last week, "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."

A socialist political perspective is required. The struggle of Kaiser workers must be united with the growing opposition to dictatorship, genocide, war, ICE raids, and the sentiments of opposition that will be on display at Saturday's "No Kings" protests.



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