

Union bureaucracy sabotages the Kaiser Permanente strike

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On Monday afternoon, the United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals abruptly shut down the month-long strike by 31,000 healthcare workers at Kaiser Permanente in California and Hawaii. There was no semblance of democratic discussion, no new contract and not even a tentative agreement. The UNAC/UHCP bureaucracy simply cited unexplained “significant movement at the bargaining table” and ordered workers back to work.

Once again a critical struggle of the working class has been sold out by the trade union bureaucracy.

Kaiser nurses and other healthcare workers were fighting against stagnant wages, chronically understaffed facilities and staffing ratios too low to provide adequate patient care. Kaiser Permanente, though formally designated a non-profit, is a healthcare giant that epitomizes the private, profit-driven character of American medicine. The corporation reported \$9.3 billion in net income, while CEO Greg Adams received \$13 million in compensation. Kaiser has recently settled with the Department of Justice for \$556 million for Medicare fraud.

Kaiser also maintains extensive investments in contractors that profit from ICE detention. It recently entered into an agreement with Walter Reed National Military Medical Center to train military doctors in preparation for mass-casualty scenarios in future wars.

The shutdown of the strike was a deliberate act of sabotage, not only against Kaiser healthcare workers but against the broader movement emerging in the country. The strike was shut down the same day that 500 Kaiser operating engineers were to have joined the strike.

UNAC/UHCP ended the strike right when it was on the verge of gaining over 100,000 reinforcements from workers across California. Sixty-five thousand teachers

and classified staff in the Los Angeles Unified School District have authorized strikes in the face of sweeping budget cuts. Forty thousand graduate and academic workers in the University of California system, members of the United Auto Workers, have voted to strike. A unified movement would have laid the basis for a powerful strike wave across the West Coast, encouraging similar action throughout the country.

The bureaucracy could not allow this because it would threaten their financial and social interests. Other similar betrayals have taken place over the last several days. Over the weekend, union officials in New York City shut down the final holdouts of a six-week strike by nurses at NewYork-Presbyterian, where nurses rejected an earlier deal the union put to a vote in violation of its own bylaws.

In California, union officials ended a four-day strike by 6,000 San Francisco teachers earlier this month. The city, awash in cash from the artificial intelligence boom, is pleading poverty for public schools. Layoffs were announced almost immediately after the strike ended, with the district citing declining enrollment.

These betrayals have been accompanied by the open intervention of Democratic Party politicians. In San Francisco, multi-millionaire Mayor Daniel Lurie and former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who amassed immense wealth during her decades in Washington, played central roles in brokering the teachers’ deal. In New York City, “democratic socialist” Mayor Zohran Mamdani and Julie Su, former US Labor Secretary and now Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice, worked behind the scenes to work out a settlement, as police arrested protesting nurses.

Similar patterns are evident elsewhere. The United Steelworkers pushed through a sellout agreement covering 30,000 refinery workers, setting the stage for

an isolated strike at BP Whiting in Indiana, where management is demanding deeper concessions. As with the previous contract reached at the start of the Ukraine war, this was a war contract. Its purpose is to keep fuel flowing as the US military wages war against Iran.

Union officials in Minneapolis and across the country have directly opposed strike action against ICE raids. Teachers unions have instructed members not to encourage or participate in student walkouts protesting deportations. The UAW warns that the right to strike is at risk under the Trump administration, yet has proposed no action to defend it.

This conduct flows from the fundamental social and economic interests of the bureaucracy, not from a merely conservative outlook. Over the past four decades, even as strike activity was driven to historic lows, spending on union officials expanded dramatically. US unions spend hundreds of millions of dollars, drawn from workers' dues and invested in the stock market, on six-figure salaries, luxury travel and a host of other privileges.

Their hostility to the working class is bound up with entrenched anticommunism, nationalism and deep connections to corporate politicians. Historically, the Democratic Party has been their principal vehicle. Increasingly, however, sections of the bureaucracy have aligned themselves with Trump, drawn by their support for "America First" policies and economic nationalism.

At Kaiser, UNAC/UHCP participates in the Labor-Management Partnership, funded by management with millions of dollars annually. The partnership was explicitly established in 1997 to prevent strikes and foster a "culture of collaboration," according to the agreement's own language. During the recent strike, Kaiser implicitly threatened this framework in a lawsuit, effectively threatening the union bureaucrats with a cutoff of funding if they failed to end the strike.

A clear rule has emerged: the more powerful the objective position of workers and the more a broader movement begins to develop, the more openly the union bureaucracy intervenes to sabotage it. No amount of "pressure" can alter the social interests of this layer any more than pressure can induce corporate management to abandon the capitalist profit motive.

Workers therefore must organize themselves to confront and override this sabotage. The task is not the reform of the apparatus but its removal from control

over the struggle and the restoration of power to the shop floor. This is a necessary step toward establishing the political independence and freedom of initiative of the working class, linking immediate contract struggles with the fight against fascism, war and social inequality.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls on workers to form rank-and-file committees, connected across workplaces and industries, to discuss strategy and prepare collective action regardless of the permission of union officials. Such organizations must be completely independent of corporate politics, including the Democratic Party, whose leaders fear an independent movement of the working class more than they oppose Trump.

A network of rank-and-file committees is indispensable to the preparation of a general strike, which emerges as the logical and necessary outcome of the developing opposition.

The IWA-RFC fights to build new forms of struggle corresponding to the conditions of the class struggle in the twenty-first century. Workers who agree with this perspective and wish to take up this fight should make contact and begin the process of organizing rank-and-file committees today.



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