

December 17, 2018



Speak Out Now

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Workers Must be on the Same Side!

Last week across California, 3600 mental health clinicians and 400 support staff in the National Union of Health Care Workers (NUHW) went out on strike against Kaiser Permanente. Kaiser refuses to hire enough mental health clinicians to meet the needs of patients.

Kaiser has continued to increase its profits for years. Last year Kaiser made \$3.8 billion in profits. It has an estimated \$29 billion in reserves. Its CEO Bernard Tyson makes \$10 million per year along with 25 other executives who make over \$1 million per year.

Despite growing profits, Kaiser has continued to demand concessions from workers. In recent contracts for nurses (in the union CNA) and stationary engineers (in the union IUOE Local 39), Kaiser has increased co-pays and cut medical coverage during retirement. It has tried to impose different wages for the same work in different regions, and it has not raised wages to keep up with the rising cost of living. And Kaiser is threatening to outsource the jobs of gardeners, call center workers, drivers, warehouse workers, parking attendants, and LVNs (workers in the union SEIU-UHW).

The situation Kaiser workers face is similar to workers throughout the country. Even though it has continued to make billions of dollars in profits, General Motors just announced layoffs of 14,500 workers, with more layoffs threatened for early next year. Both Ford and Chrysler have announced similar cuts.

Recently Marriot workers went on strike across the country for over one month. Marriot is the largest hotel chain in the world, and has made record profits recently but refuses to pay workers enough to live on. The workers' slogan was "One Job Should Be Enough" – a demand that could apply to all working people.

And in Oakland, California teachers and students face millions of dollars in budget cuts from Oakland Unified School District. The district has already cut student programs and closed schools, and is now threatening to

close even more schools and layoff more teachers. As housing costs continue to skyrocket in the Bay Area, Oakland teachers can't afford to live near their work. Oakland teachers may go on strike in 2019 in order to resist these enormous cut backs.

Workers across the country are struggling to get by as corporations and their owners are making a killing. In 2018, the richest 400 people in the U.S. had a total wealth of \$2.89 trillion, more than the bottom 64 percent of country combined. The average CEO makes 312 times the average worker. Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos' wealth recently skyrocketed to \$160 billion, making him the richest man in the world. In just nine seconds he makes what the average Amazon worker makes in one year.

No politician from either the Democrat or Republican parties will do anything about this situation. They both serve the interests of the corporations, not the workers. And they want to keep all workers divided, so they can try to pick us off one by one. They don't want workers to recognize that we are all on the same side of the same fight, regardless of the work we do, the country we come from, or the union we may be part of, if we even belong to one.

In France, we recently caught a glimpse of what this kind of working class unity can look like as hundreds of thousands of workers have been together for weeks taking to the streets in opposition to the overall worsening conditions workers face. In mid-November this "yellow vest" movement began as a protest against a gasoline tax but has since spread to include workers from all over France, including high school and university students.

There's no reason this kind of a fight couldn't happen in this country too. As workers we have an enormous power because it is our work that makes this whole society run. This is a power we have that is waiting to be tapped into. Many of us may not be aware of it now, but if we can organize our forces together, we can defend our own interests and fight for the world we want to live in.