Kaiser Workers Avoid Two-Tier Wages

Over thirty thousand members of three of the largest unions in what is known as the Alliance of Health Care Unions at Kaiser in Southern California and Oregon, voted to go on an unlimited strike starting November 15th. The strike was called off after a tentative agreement was reached with Kaiser.

The decision to strike followed months of negotiations during which Kaiser refused to accept the unions’ proposals and instead they proposed a two-tier wage system that would have divided the workforce and slashed the wages and benefits of new hires. The current tentative agreement avoids the two-tier wage system and offers the workers a 3% wage increase during the first two years, and 2% for the last two.

While avoiding a two-tier wage system should be celebrated, a 3% yearly wage increase that becomes 2% after the second year doesn’t even begin to cover the increasing cost of living. This is an insult coming from such a profitable company as Kaiser, which made $2.2 billion dollars in operating revenue in 2020. Kaiser avoided a massive strike, but the price tag has still been passed on to the workers.

United We Win

Kaiser is currently at the center of at least five labor struggles including strikes. The engineers have been on strike for months now, 30,000 people almost went on strike in SoCal and Oregon, pharmacists in NorCal voted to go on strike as well, SEIU, CNA, and other unions will join the striking workers on a one-day solidarity strike this week, and nurses in SF have been holding informational pickets to protest Kaiser’s unsafe patient care practices.

Kaiser knows what this means, and they are already diverting patients and reducing services, since without thousands of workers they won’t be able to keep the system running. All of us need to remember this as well. The issues that these separate unions are fighting for are not in fact separate issues. We should all be fighting together to improve our working conditions. Because without us, Kaiser cannot function, and when we fight together, we can win.

Don’t Call it a Wage Increase

The cost of living has skyrocketed in recent months. Currently inflation is at 6.2% and still on the rise — this is the largest increase in over three decades. The price of gasoline, milk, diapers, soap, clothing — everything — has gone way up. This means that in order for a wage increase to actual count as a net increase, it would have increase by more than 6.2%.

Kaiser wants to pat itself on the back for offering at most 2% or 3% wage increases. Of course, for workers every little bit can help, and this is better than nothing. But in fact, anything less than 6.2% is still a wage cut.

Pharmacists Reach Last Minute Deal

In Northern California, 2,500 Kaiser pharmacists (organized in the Guild for Professional Pharmacists) reached an 11th hour tentative agreement and called off their strike. Prior to the agreement, spokespersons for the pharmacists said that Kaiser was refusing to negotiate and kept offering worse deals whenever they did meet. Like most departments in Kaiser, pharmacies continue to operate with short staffing and long lines.

The summary of the agreement does not specify the details, but says it includes wage increases and no other takeaways. But are the wage increases enough to keep up with the skyrocketing cost of living? Will the agreement do anything to address the chronic understaffing in the pharmacies? Even though Kaiser has plenty of monty to address both of these, we know they didn’t. For that to happen, all workers at Kaiser would have to stick together.

Virtual Holiday Celebration

Come celebrate with us as we recognize the struggles across the world from the past year and prepare for those that lie ahead!

Saturday, December 4th at 4pm

Info at: speakoutsocialists.org

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Kaiser’s Profits since 2019:

$13.8 billion

CEO Greg Adams 2020 salary:

$6.7 million ($18, 356 per day)