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1,700 Bay Area Kaiser Permanente Optometrists, Scientists Approve Sympathy Strike to Support 80,000 Kaiser Workers Set to Strike Oct. 14

OAKLAND, Calif. – A Bay Area union of 1,700 Kaiser Permanente optometrists, laboratory scientists, geneticists and home health therapists recently voted to authorize a sympathy strike in support of the more than 80,000 other Kaiser workers who will strike beginning Oct. 14, which would be the nation’s largest strike in more than two decades – and affects more than 24,000 workers in the Bay Area.

“We strongly voted in support of a sympathy strike because of Kaiser’s unfair labor practices,” said Dr. Joan Mah, an optometrist at Kaiser Permanente in San Rafael, Calif. “If Kaiser can just get away with unlawful activity unchecked, when will it stop?”

The 1,700 members of IFPTE Local 20 voted between Sept. 3 and Sept. 16 to approve a sympathy strike in support of the unfair labor practices strike at Kaiser Permanente hospitals and medical offices in California being called for by SEIU-UHW. Unions in Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C., which are part of the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions, are also planning unfair labor practices strikes at the same time. Of those IFPTE workers casting ballots, 95 percent voted in support of a strike.

A “sympathy strike” occurs when one union supports another union that is directly involved in a labor dispute, such as many of the unions in the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions.

Laboratory scientists provide information medical doctors need to properly diagnose and treat patients, as well as ensure correct blood products are given to patients during surgery or an emergency. Kaiser has not informed IFPTE Local 20 of coverage plans of this important work.

Workers at the other Kaiser Permanente unions want the healthcare giant to bargain in good faith, stop committing unfair labor practices, and negotiate a new National Agreement that would:

1. Restore a true worker-management partnership, and have Kaiser bargain in good faith;
2. Ensure safe staffing and compassionate use of technology;
3. Build the workforce of the future to deal with major projected shortages of licensed and accredited staff in the coming years; and
4. Protect middle-class jobs with wages and benefits that can support families.

As a non-profit entity, Kaiser Permanente is supposed to serve the public interest in exchange for billions of dollars in tax breaks. But in recent years, the corporation has departed from its mission:

- **Profits:**
Kaiser made more than \$5.2 billion in profits during the first half of 2019, bringing its profits to more than \$11 billion since Jan. 1, 2017. The company also sits on more than \$37 billion in reserves.
- **Executive pay:**
Kaiser gave its CEO a \$6 million raise to \$16 million a year and pays at least 36 executives a million dollars or more a year.
- **Turning its back on workers:**
Kaiser has worked to destroy what had been the most successful and largest worker-management partnership in the country that was a source of innovation and problem-solving for many years; it has committed numerous unfair labor practices, including refusing to bargain in good faith.
- **Destroying good jobs.**
Kaiser is actively destroying good jobs by outsourcing them to companies that pay low wages with few benefits, and wants to limit the wages and cut the benefits of its frontline healthcare employees.

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The Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions comprises labor unions in California, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Hawaii, Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia, representing more than 80,000 Kaiser caregivers. To learn more, visit www.KaiserKeepThriveAlive.com.