

NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

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VOLUME 120, NUMBER 17

PORTLAND, OREGON

SEPTEMBER 6, 2019

A SEASON OF STRIKES?

Massive Kaiser Permanente strike could come in October

By Don McIntosh

More than 80,000 workers in six states could go on strike at Kaiser Permanente in early October if the thriving non-profit health provider doesn't drop its demand for contract concessions. If the strike happens, it would be the biggest in the United States in 22 years, since the Teamsters struck UPS in 1997. The workers who would strike are members of 11 local affiliates of Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Office and Professional Employees (OPEIU), and Technical and Professional Employees (IFTPE) that bargain together as the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions (CKPU).

Kaiser is the most heavily unionized health provider network in the nation, and one of the biggest, with 39 hospitals and 701 medical offices in eight



Members and supporters of SEIU Local 49 picketed Aug. 21 at Kaiser Permanente Westside Medical Center in Hillsboro. Two days later Local 49 wrapped up strike balloting: The result was a 98% vote to authorize a strike.

states plus the District of Columbia. By all accounts, it's doing extremely well, with \$85 billion gross annual revenue, and

net profit of \$5.2 billion in the first six months of 2019. Kaiser is also unusual in the health care industry: As a non-profit health

maintenance organization (HMO), it operates in much of its territory as both an insurance

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Grocery workers ready to walk in 3 states

By Don McIntosh

In a series of strike votes over the summer, members of United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW) in Oregon, Washington, and California voted overwhelmingly to authorize strikes if contract bargaining with big grocery chains fails to produce acceptable union contracts.

On one side are 20,000 members of UFCW Local 555 in Oregon and Southwest Washington, (and another 30,000 members of nine UFCW locals in Southern California.) On the other side are two massive grocery companies that own multiple grocery chains: Kroger (which owns chains including Fred Meyer and QFC in the Northwest and Ralph's in California) and Albertsons (which owns Safeway, Albertsons, and 18 other chains). The grocers bargain together as an employer group.

"They're offering nickels and dimes, and we're asking for dollars," says UFCW Local 555



COULD THE DISPUTE WIDEN TO THE PUGET SOUND? Members of UFCW Local 21 in Tacoma, above, began picketing in August to protest employer contract offers similar to those in California, Oregon and Southwest Washington.

bargaining team member Tena Burch-Wolski, who works as a cashier at a Fred Meyer store in Vancouver.

At an Aug. 29 negotiating session, the Local 555 bargaining team was stunned to receive an employer wage offer that would have been below Oregon's mini-

mum wage, which is set to rise to \$14.75 in the Portland area in three years. When the union pointed that out, management negotiators increased the offer to 10 cents above minimum.

Local 555 also says the latest

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NATIONAL

Union approval near 50-year high

The Gallup polling organization reported Aug. 28 that 64% of Americans approve of labor unions, near the highest level in 50 years. Since 1936, the organization has been regularly asking Americans whether they approve or disapprove of unions. Approval averaged 68% between Gallup's 1936 and 1967 polling, but dropped somewhat after that, reaching a low of 48% in 2009. In the most recent poll, conducted Aug. 1-14, 64% said they approve, 32% disapprove, and 5% had no opinion. Respondents were more likely to approve of unions if they were in a union household or lean left politically: 86% of U.S. adults living in a household with a union member approve of unions, compared with 60% of those in nonunion households, and Democrats (82%) remained far more likely than Republicans (45%) to approve of unions.

Mobile monopoly

Communications Workers of America (CWA) is denouncing last month's decision by the Trump Justice Department to allow a takeover by T-Mobile of its rival Sprint, which would leave Americans just three wireless providers to choose from: AT&T, Verizon and T-Mobile. CWA says T-Mobile and Sprint have a long history of labor law violations, and the merger will eliminate 30,000 U.S. jobs when T-Mobile shuts down duplicate retail stores and consolidates back-office functions. Justice Department lawyers earlier said the merger would make it easier for the three remaining carriers to coordinate pricing, with the result that American consumers collectively would pay billions more each year for wireless service. The merger could still be stopped: 15 state attorneys general have filed suit in federal court to block it.

Strike date set at hospital in Springfield

About 400 hospital workers represented by SEIU Local 49 are getting ready for a three-day strike at McKenzie Willamette Medical Center in Springfield. The Sept. 10-12 strike will protest unlawful conduct by the for-profit hospital, understaffing, and proposed healthcare cost increases. Local 49 represents housekeepers, cafeteria workers, certified nursing assistants, respiratory therapists, X-ray and emergency room technicians, and other technical and support occupations. The two sides were set to meet again Sept. 4, after this issue of the Labor Press went to the printer.