

New Jersey casino strike ends

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Striking workers returned to their jobs after ratifying an agreement negotiated between their union, Local 54 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees, and seven casinos in Atlantic City. The new five-year package calls for a total compensation increase of 28 percent for the 10,000 union members, including housekeepers, food workers and bartenders. The announced increase includes not only wages, but also pension benefits and health insurance.

The union caved in on the most contentious issues in the contract dispute, which began October 1. The first of these issues was the length of the contract. The union wanted a three-year contract so that its expiration date would coincide with gaming industry contracts in other cities, such as Las Vegas, Detroit and Chicago. This would have given the union greater nationwide leverage, and for this reason the Atlantic City casinos were adamant in insisting on a five-year deal.

Another issue in the strike was subcontracting. According to the agreement, two nonunion restaurants will be allowed to open.

About 6,000 of the 10,000 union members voted and accepted the agreement by a 96 percent approval rate. Without a doubt, this vote reflects the overwhelming desire of the strikers to return to work and get a paycheck. It has been reported that many workers obtained other jobs to feed their families and pay accumulating bills while performing their picket duties. This strike was the longest in the 25-year history of the Atlantic City gaming industry.



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