

Atlantic City casino strike continues despite management ultimatum

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Roughly 1,000 workers at The Trump Taj Mahal casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey, members of UNITE HERE, are continuing their strike despite a 5 p.m. Monday deadline set by management to accept the casino's final contract offer. A company spokesman said the casino would now withdraw its offer for a partial restoration of health care benefits.

Cooks, housekeepers, bellmen and servers at the casino have been out on strike since July 1. The Trump Taj Mahal, now owned by notorious corporate raider Carl Ichan, is refusing to fully restore health and benefits cuts imposed in 2014 bankruptcy proceedings.

Under management's last proposal the company offered health insurance that was roughly half of what was offered to workers at nearby casinos. One member of the UNITE HERE bargaining committee noted that his spouse would not be covered by the proposed health insurance plan.

The UNITE HERE union has acted to keep the workers isolated. It agreed to contracts at Bally's Atlantic City, Caesars Atlantic City, and Harrah's Resort on July 1, and a separate contract for Tropicana—which is also owned by Ichan—was approved last Thursday.

While UNITE HERE has posted a note on its web site congratulating the Tropicana workers for ratifying the contract, the union has made no attempt to explain why it agreed to a deal with Tropicana Entertainment Inc., which manages both the Tropicana Atlantic City and Taj Mahal casinos, while Taj Mahal workers remain on the picket line.

In an interview with the *Press of Atlantic City* UNITE HERE Local 54 President Bob McDevitt denounced the contract being offered to Taj Mahal workers, saying the proposal was a “shadow” of the contracts worked out with the other casinos.

In the same interview, McDevitt stated that workers were given a “reasonable amount of money” in strike pay, but declined to state any specific amount.

UNITE HERE has based its entire strategy on subordinating the struggle of the Taj Mahal workers to the maneuverings of Democratic and Republican politicians.

On July 6, Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton was allowed to use the strike as a campaign prop in which she denounced Donald Trump for hypocrisy over his promotion of economic nationalism by pointing to the outsourcing of jobs by Trump-owned enterprises. After being introduced by local businessman Marty Rosenberg, she went on to assert her pro-business credentials and need to “make things in America again.”

After this brief photo-op, in which the struggle of the casino workers was barely mentioned, Clinton continued on the campaign trail, not to be heard from again.

A few days after Clinton's visit, Democratic Senator Corey Booker and Republican Congressman Frank LoBiondo were allowed to address picketing workers outside the Taj Mahal. Both Booker and LoBiondo, with breathtaking hypocrisy, praised the strikers for “set[ting] a standard that goes way beyond just this casino.” They did not mention that New Jersey Republicans and Democrats have colluded to impose round after round of budget cuts across the state and are considering legislation that would allow a state takeover of the finances of near-bankrupt Atlantic City, abrogating union contracts.

The use of bankruptcy courts to rip up workers' contracts has become a frequent practice under the Obama administration. It was used in the auto industry in 2008, Hostess in 2012, and supermarket chain A&P

in 2015.

Since losing their health benefits in 2014, Taj Mahal employees have been forced to purchase health care as part of the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, or face fines. It is estimated that at least a third of workers and their families do not have insurance.

Given the poverty wages being earned by the casino workers, the demands of UNITE HERE are totally inadequate. In addition to restoration of health care these include upwards of one week of paid vacation and a \$3-an-hour raise that would be implemented over the course of five years.

According to the union's own figures, the cost of living in Atlantic City has risen by more than 25 percent over the last 12 years, but many Taj Mahal workers have received a raise of less than \$1 an hour over the same period. On average, workers at the Taj Mahal are paid less than \$11.74 per hour.

The union is currently requiring strikers to picket four hours a day, as part of a 24-hour-a-day picket, in order to receive strike pay. The union explained that they were limiting the requirement for picketing in order not to interfere with second jobs many Taj Mahal workers need to work in order to survive.

On Tuesday UNITE HERE said it would suspend picketing to allow strikers to attend the funeral of Esau Ivan Madrid, 62, a Trump Taj Mahal dishwasher who died Thursday. The union said that Madrid had a health condition requiring regular medical attention that was unaffordable since the Taj Mahal took away health benefits in 2014.



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