

As strike enters second month

## Owners announce plan to close Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort next month

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The owners of the Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort said Wednesday that the strikebound casino would close after Labor Day weekend. In making the announcement president and CEO of Tropicana Entertainment, Tony Rodio, claimed the casino's owners had "fiduciary duties to their shareholders." The company will send mass layoff notices by the end of the week.

Dubbed the "eighth wonder of the world" upon its opening in 1990, the casino employed more than 2,100 people at the end of 2015. The casino was formerly owned by current Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump and has since been taken over by corporate raider Carl Icahn.

Nearly 1,000 casino workers at The Trump Taj Mahal walked out on strike on July 1 for restored health and pension benefits, an increase in pay and better working conditions. The health and pension benefits were taken away in a bankruptcy settlement in 2014. On strike are cooks, housekeepers, bellmen and servers who face absolutely abysmal working conditions. The average pay at the casino is less than \$11.74 per hour and the majority of workers have seen no more than 80 cents in raises since 2004.

Despite the owners' claim that the strike forced the closing, the casino's demise was prepared far in advance. In a letter to employees in March, Carl Icahn wrote: "Simply put, north Jersey gaming will probably be a death sentence for the Taj and the Atlantic City economy."

The Unite-Here bureaucracy was well aware of the owners' plan to close the casino. However, Local 54 President Bob McDevitt has echoed the claim of Icahn and casino management that the strike provoked the

closure. "For a few million bucks, he could have had labor peace and a content workforce, but instead he'd rather slam the door shut on these long-term workers just to punish them and attempt to break their strike," He continued, "There was no element of trying to reach an agreement here on Icahn's part; it was always 'my way or the highway' from the beginning with Icahn."

Considering that Icahn suggested some months ago the casino would close, McDevitt's claim that the decision to close the casino was largely a response to the strike is disingenuous, aimed at covering up the unions' collusion with management.

From the start United-Here has worked to isolate the strike. At the very same time the Taj Mahal workers walked out, the union signed 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 Icahn.

Then, as a diversion, the union allowed the strike to be used as a photo op by Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, who held a campaign rally last month in Atlantic City in an attempt to score points against Republican candidate Trump.

In her speech Clinton promoted economic nationalism and her own pro-business credentials. She went on to attack Trump for his poor business record and the inconsistencies in his nationalist rhetoric. "If he wants to make America great again," she said, "maybe he should start by actually making things in America again."

However, Clinton has since steered clear of the strike. She has issued no statement on the threat to close the Taj Mahal and has made no reference to the strike in her subsequent campaign appearances.

For their part, Democratic Senator Corey Booker and Republican Congressman Frank LoBiondo were also invited to address the picket line outside the Taj Mahal. The two politicians offered hollow praise for the strikers, claiming they “set a standard that goes way beyond just this casino.”

While now professing support for striking workers, New Jersey Democrats have collaborated with Republicans to force through multiple rounds of budget cuts across the state and are now considering legislation for a state takeover of the finances of Atlantic City, which is on the edge of bankruptcy. Such a maneuver would give the state the power to abrogate union contracts.

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. Many workers are forced to rely on social assistance programs such as food stamps in order to survive. In 2014, four of the city’s 12 casinos were closed, slashing over 8,000 jobs. US census figures show the median income in Atlantic City was just \$26,936 in 2015, with 35.8 percent of the population living below the official poverty level.

Since losing health benefits in 2014, workers have been forced to purchase health insurance as part of the Affordable Care Act under penalty of fines. An estimated third of employees and their families do not have health insurance at all.

The strike, limited as it has been, has garnered the overwhelming support of Taj Mahal employees, with 98 percent of workers honoring the picket line. Social media posts have indicated a strong sense of militancy and solidarity among workers.



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