

Las Vegas casino workers to vote on sellout deals

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Nearly two weeks after their contracts expired on June 1, roughly 57,000 Las Vegas casino workers, members of the Culinary Workers Union (CWU) Local 226, are still working without a new contract. Ignoring the near unanimous strike vote by workers, the CWU kept workers on the job past the contract deadline and then announced it had reached tentative agreements with the two largest casino owners.

The union has told workers at Caesar's Entertainment and MGM Resorts International, which collectively own 18 of the 34 casinos, that they will not see details of the settlement until the day of the ratification votes on June 14 for Caesar's and June 19 for MGM. In addition, another 14,000 workers are continuing to work without even the semblance of an agreement at 16 facilities run by other casino owners with expired CWU contracts, including Boyd Gaming.

When the CWU announced it had reached agreements—without releasing any details—the *World Socialist Web Site* warned workers that they should not take anything the union said as good coin. As is often the case, unions announce deals solely to prevent strikes even before a full contract is signed and then drag out a ratification process for weeks. “Workers should immediately demand the full contract and all secret letters of understanding,” the WSWS wrote, adding that workers “must have sufficient time to study and discuss it before any vote.”

The assertion that workers should have the basic democratic right to see and study a contract that will dictate the terms of their employment for the next five years before voting on it, apparently hit a raw nerve with the CWU bureaucracy. Bethany Khan, the union's director of communications, denounced the WSWS. She dashed off a tweet saying, “It is possible a full contract may not even exist.”// What is this nonsense other than full of conjecture & fake news? Who do these writers think they are to tell mostly black/brown immigrant what's best for us? Romanticizing strikes? Hero worshipping workers? NEXT!”

In a supposed rebuke to the WSWS, Khan attached a press release from the union that simply declared that it had

reached an agreement—and that it was “historic.” Khan did not, however, release the contract or even a supposed summary of its details. This only begs the question: what does the union have to hide? The only reasonable conclusion is that it is cutting a deal that is so egregious that workers would reject it if they had the time to study and discuss it.

Instead, workers can expect to receive a sugarcoated bullet-point list of all the “victories” supposedly in the contract when they arrive at the ratification meetings on Thursday and on June 19. For this every reason alone, rank-and-file workers should reject the deal on principle.

From the beginning, the union called for an insulting four percent increase in all-in labor costs, which include wages *plus* health care and other benefits. This is under conditions in which the surging prices of gasoline, food and other necessities raised the annual inflation rate to 2.8 percent in February, the highest level in six years. After the unions granted major concessions in 2013, including wage freezes, the major casinos made record profits in 2017, breaking the previous revenue record set in 2007. Nevertheless, the owners have been adamant that they would limit raises to two percent.

Announcing the deal with Caesar's Entertainment, CWU Secretary-Treasurer Geoconda Arguello-Kline boasted that the agreement reached was “the best contract with the highest wage increases that workers have ever had.” When questioned by WSWS reporters at a June 1 press conference, another union representative said, “We're not speaking about wages right now ... I can tell you that this is a success for us, and a success for the company. They can continue to do their job, and we can continue to have the American dream.”

While the highly paid union executives may consider low wages, precarious work hours and abuse “living the American dream,” casino workers voted by 99 percent to strike to fir for serious wage improvements.

While downplaying wages, the union apparatus has pursued its own income and institutional interests in the contract negotiations. Of greatest importance is the

continuation of union's franchise in the event of a change in corporate ownership. CWU executives have also sought positions in the policy-making and cost-cutting operations of the casinos, such as joint union-casino research into housekeeping workloads and the implementation of new technology.

The defense of immigrants remains a crucial issue for Las Vegas workers. One-fifth of the whole state's population is immigrant, and the union's membership is 54 percent Latino and 15 percent Asian, many of whom are from Mexico and the Philippines. Previous contracts provided immigrants with a one-year period to renew their work permits. The new contract seeks to extend that grace period to five years, along with asking the casino companies to ban Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents from their properties unless they have a warrant.

These arrangements will do little to defend workers from the brutal anti-immigrant crackdown being spearheaded by the Trump administration. Backed by both the Democrats and Republicans, ICE has nearly unprecedented powers to coerce, arrest, detain and abuse anyone, with or without a warrant. In May, ICE officials broke into a home in San Diego without a warrant to detain an immigrant worker in front of his wife and five children. Earlier this month, ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) arrested 114 people in Gestapo-style raids on two garden and landscaping workplaces in northern Ohio, with a search warrant.

In so far as the union and owners oppose such raids in the casinos, it is only to secure their mutually beneficial arrangement whereby the corporations exploit a low-wage workforce and the union gets to collect a steady stream of dues revenue.

Over the last few weeks, the CWU and its parent union—Unite HERE—have focused their efforts on electing Nevada Democrats in the June 12 primary. One of the union candidates is Robert Langford for District Attorney. His “progressive” immigration program includes, “increasing trust between immigrants and police” by enforcing cooperation with the law, regardless if that law supports workplace raids or the separation of families.

Under Obama, more immigrants were deported than under any other administration. The Democratic president also oversaw the largest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top in US history. While the Wall Street banks were bailed out, workers suffered and continue to suffer falling real wages and declining living standards as the companies and the government shift the cost of health care and pensions onto their backs.

The union communications director who castigated the WSWS for “romanticizing strikes” and “hero worshipping workers” is a Democratic Party operative. Named by the

American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) as one of the “40 under 40,” Bethany Khan worked on the campaign of Nevada's US Senator Catherine Cortez Masto and the union's failed get out-the-vote bid for Hillary Clinton. Khan worked closely with former Culinary Union political director, Yvanna Cancela, who “was appointed the first Latina State Senator” in 2016 and ran in yesterday's primaries.

Like the unions, the Democrats certainly cannot be accused of “worshipping strikes.” Under the Obama presidency, the unions limited strikes to the lowest level since 1947. Responding to the growing strike waves this year, including most notably the rebellion of teachers, the unions are doing everything they can to prevent strikes from growing out of their control and challenging the low-wage regime and austerity measures enforced by the Democrats and Republicans alike.

Far from being organizations that fight for workers, the unions are the biggest obstacle to the development of working class opposition to social inequality and attacks on democratic rights. For casino workers to take forward their fight, they must form new organizations of struggle, rank-and-file factory and workplace committees, which are independent of and opposed to the corporatist trade unions and both big business parties. These committees must unite all workers, immigrant and native-born, service workers and private sector workers, in a common fight to improve living standards, working conditions and to uphold the rights of all workers to live and work anywhere they chose with full citizenship rights.

The development of such an industrial counter-offensive must be combined with the building of a powerful political movement of the working class to break the dictatorial hold of the banks and big business, take political power and carry out the socialist reorganization of economic and political life.



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