

“All the hotel workers should go on strike”

Chicago hotel workers continue walkout as workers throughout the US vote to strike

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The first city-wide strike of more than 5,000 hotel workers at 26 hotels in Chicago continues into its 11th day against multinational hotel chains Marriott, Hyatt and Hilton.

Thousands of hotel workers in Hawaii, Seattle and San Francisco, California, have also voted for strike authorization by large numbers. Strike authorization votes are expected to be taken in Detroit, San Diego, Oakland, California, and other cities.

On September 11, more than 3,500 Hawaiian hotel workers in Honolulu and Maui voted to strike by more than 95 percent. In Boston, more than 1,000 Marriott hotel workers voted to strike by 96 percent in favor on September 13. On the same day, 98.6 percent of Marriott workers in San Francisco voted in favor of strike action.

The strike of Chicago hotel workers and the rebellious mood of hotel workers across the country intersects with the growth of workers struggles in the United States and internationally. Teachers, UPS workers, steelworkers and other sections of workers are seeking to fight back after decades of declining wages imposed by the corporations, trade unions and the Democratic and Republican parties.

The previous contract covering the hotel workers in the US expired on August 31. UNITE HERE Local 1, which has 15,000 members including 6,000 covered by expired hotel contracts, has largely kept the workers in the dark about negotiations. In 2015, the union imposed a sellout deal that created the very conditions that workers continue to face today, such as low wages and poor healthcare that provides no coverage when workers are laid off during the winter.

The giant hotel chains make billions in profits

through the super-exploitation of hotel workers. In Chicago, the hotel chains made more than \$2 billion alone in 2017. The average CEO of these multinational hotels makes millions. Christopher Nasetta, CEO of Hilton Hotels and Resorts, has the highest payout, at \$17 million a year.

While Marriott owns 5,800 properties in over 110 countries, with an international workforce, UNITE HERE keep workers divided not just along national lines, but also by different contracts at every individual hotel.

The union is seeking to wear down workers and prevent the strike from spreading, paying only \$300 a week in strike pay. UNITE HERE has close ties to the Democratic Party and wants to shut down the strike as soon as possible to prevent the joint action of hotel workers throughout the US and globally.

For their services as labor managers for the hotel corporations, the union bureaucracy is rewarded handsomely. Donald Taylor, the president of UNITE HERE, made over \$370,000 in 2017, more than 10 times the wage of the average hotel worker.

Jonathan is one of many workers enduring poverty conditions whom *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to over the weekend. He is a dishwasher at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place hotel, located at the site at one of the largest convention centers in Chicago. The hotel is a 33-story luxury hotel with over 1,200 rooms, most averaging around \$500 a night.

“Healthcare is the most important issue to me,” Jonathan said. “I’ve worked here as a dishwasher for 24 years. We need good health care for our kids and for ourselves.”

The Hyatt Corporation has over 777 properties in 54

countries. It is owned and operated by the billionaire Chicago-based Pritzker family, which has a net worth of more than \$29 billion. The Pritzkers have heavily funded Democratic Party politics in Chicago and around the country. They also play a significant role in the formulation of US imperialist military strategy.

The strike by hotel workers pits them against billionaire Democratic candidate J. B. Pritzker, who is running for governor in Illinois against the current billionaire governor, Republican Bruce Rauner. Pritzker's campaign has ties to the unions in Illinois, and he claimed to "stand with the labor movement," even as he and his family have made their fortunes off the back-breaking work of Hyatt hotel workers in Chicago. Pritzker's campaign epitomizes the nexus of exploitation of hotel workers by the political establishment, the corporations and the unions.

"That Pritzker money should be going towards us," Jonathan said. "We do all the work."

Dennis spoke about the cuts to hours and staff at Hyatt. "I've been here for fifteen years," he said. "I was working as a bartender and server, full time. But it wasn't until the past year or two the company decided that it would cut one of my positions. So now, although I'm a full-timer, I get less than fifteen hours a week.

"The company created a loophole with our previous contract. So now, when you have full-timers that are laid off during the slow period, they get no healthcare. How is that possible? You've been here ten years, fifteen years, you're planning on retiring here. Now you've developed health issues. These aren't pre-existing, these are health issues that started to come about as you worked here, as you got older. Now that your need healthcare, it's not there.

"Hyatt rewards people with cash bonuses and raises in management and HR [Human Resources] who keep workers at home and cut their hours. They reward people who cut hours from workers who are counting their money at home to see if they have enough to pay for their medicine, like pills for cancer.

"And there's no cost of living raises in the contract. They should have it regardless of the contract. You're talking about living in a city that's one of the most expensive to live in. So how do you expect us to live here?"

Nuri, a hotel worker from a nearby Marriott hotel, came by to support the Hyatt workers on strike.

"Sometimes we are scared," she said. "These are multi-billion-dollar companies. These companies are really greedy when they could pay only a little more to us, and they wouldn't lose anything. But we are reminded that we are all in this together and that we are ready to struggle.

"I've been wondering why we aren't striking everywhere in all the cities," Nuri added. "It's not just Chicago. It should be an international struggle at the same time. All the hotel workers should go on strike. Other workers should join us. The working class needs to fight together."

The struggle of hotel workers can only be taken forward through the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions, to formulate the demands of the workers themselves and unite the struggles of all hotel workers with other sections of the working class. No faith can be placed in the union, its secret negotiations and the sellout deal it is working on behind the scenes.



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