

# Striking workers rally at Westin Book Cadillac Hotel in Detroit

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Workers on strike at the Westin Book Cadillac Hotel held a rally in downtown Detroit Tuesday evening. A walkout by workers at the hotel—the first of its kind in the city for 30 years—began on Sunday and is part of a growing wave of strikes by hotel workers, members of the UNITE HERE union, across the US.

In addition to Detroit, workers are striking hotels owned by the giant conglomerate Marriott International in Hawaii, San Francisco, San Jose, Boston and Chicago, bringing the total number to 7,700 workers in 23 hotels. While the union has been forced to expand the strike because of the determination of workers to recoup past concessions, UNITE HERE has moved to shut down the strike in Chicago, where it began, by signing separate contracts with different hotel chains. Workers at only two of the original 26 hotels that were struck remain on strike.

The union accepted a wage freeze for workers at the Book Cadillac Hotel in 2008 and workers have only received a 70 cent per hour pay raise since then. Workers make \$6,000 a year less than their counterparts in the nearby Detroit Westin, Renaissance Center, where workers have not been called out on strike. Facing a rising cost of living, including medical bills, workers have had to take on multiple jobs to make ends meet.

The rally was addressed by local Democratic politicians and trade union bureaucrats, including Rashida Tlaib, the presumptive replacement for former Rep. John Conyers in the US House of Representatives, as well as Abdul El Sayed, a former state gubernatorial candidate endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). The politicians issued empty promises of support while covering up for the role of the Democrats who oversaw the slashing of autoworkers' wages during Obama's auto bailout and collaborated

with the Republican administration of Michigan Governor Rick Snyder to attack city workers and teachers during the bankruptcy restructuring of the city and public schools. The city is supposed to be undergoing a revival, but it has only helped a narrow affluent layer, including billionaire developer Dan Gilbert.

In discussions with reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site*, hotel workers expressed anger that workers at the nearby Westin Renaissance Center and the Westin at Metropolitan Airport, also owned by Marriott, were continuing to work. There was a widespread desire to break the isolation of the strike and unify with other sections of workers—teachers, UPS workers, nurses and others—facing the same struggle.

Brad, a bartender with four years at the hotel, told the WSWS, “The contract they offered us is just absurd. It didn't even come close to what we were asking for—not only wages, but matching 401ks, better health benefits, improved working conditions. They can do a lot better.”

“I make \$10.80 an hour, and a company this profitable in a city in a ‘renaissance period’ is crazy. It's pure greed for them not to give us anything. The contract offered by management was absurd, it was a provocation.”

He added, “With the rent going up and other living costs, it's essentially like slavery. They're forcing us into a position where it's either stand on the streets or work for a subpar wage.”

Mahala, who has been a cook since March, talked about management demands. “They didn't really make a counter-offer, they were just saying, ‘Leave us alone.’ Ten cents a year for seven years, with inflation? No way.”

Mahala added, “Several people here have multiple

jobs. Some work for Uber, and you shouldn't have to go through that. It's destroying family relations. You wonder why young people grow up to be delinquent when social relations are like this."

Zual, a server with 2 years at the hotel, brought his family to the picket line. He told the WSWS, "The money we want is \$2 more an hour. As a company, we make more money than Renaissance Hotel. We all deserve more money. Through us they're able to buy more hotels every day."

Regarding the rising cost of healthcare, Zual said, "I pay \$300 a month for healthcare for my kids. If (Amazon CEO) Jeff Bezos paid his employees \$50 an hour he wouldn't lose a dime. They believe we're animals. These rich people know what they're doing."

When asked his thoughts about workers at UPS, which voted down the contract only to have the Teamsters claim it was ratified, Zual said, "I believe UPS workers should go on strike. People will support them. If we have a general strike, things will get better. It's like winning a war."

Keith is the lead Banquet houseman with 10 years at the hotel. He told the WSWS, "I am making only \$2.50 more than when I started 10 years ago. All the properties around here make more than us. I was making more when I worked at the Renaissance Hotel."

Quentin has been in room service for 3 years. "In my department I'm a server, but I also buff the floors, expedite orders, etc. At other places there's a person for every one of those jobs, but I make \$2.50 less here. Who wants to live like that?"

Quentin also spoke about the stress involved with having to live off tips as opposed to a living wage, saying, "I live off my tips, not my hourly wage. One week to the next, I don't know how much my income will be. You have to pay \$2,000 a year just to park here for work. I pay over \$60 a week in health coverage."

WSWS reporters asked Quentin his thoughts on a general strike, to which he replied, "Imagine if every worker in the world called off sick for a day. The guy who makes millions off us on Wall Street would jump out the window."



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